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The Bahṛī Mamlūk sultanate, 1250–1390

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When the [ʿAbbāsīd] state was drowned in decadence and luxury and donned the garments of calamity and impotence and was overthrown by the heathen Tatars, who abolished the seat of the Caliphate and obliterated the splendor of the lands and made unbelief prevail in place of belief, because the people of the faith, sunk in self-indulgence, preoccupied with pleasure and abandoned to luxury, had become deficient in energy and reluctant to rally in defense, and had stripped off the skin of courage and the emblem of manhood – then, it was God's benevolence that He rescued the faith by reviving its dying breath and restoring the unity of the Muslims in the Egyptian realms, preserving the order and defending the walls of Islam. He did this by sending to the Muslims, from this Turkish nation and from among its great and numerous tribes, rulers to defend them and utterly loyal helpers, who were brought from the House of War to the House of Islam under the rule of slavery, which hides in itself a divine blessing. By means of slavery they learn glory and blessing and are exposed to divine providence; cured by slavery, they enter the Muslim religion with the firm resolve of true believers and yet with nomadic virtues unsullied by debased nature, unadulterated with the filth of pleasure, undefiled by the ways of civilized living, and with their ardor unbroken by the profusion of luxury. The slave merchants bring them to Egypt in batches, like sandgrouse to the watering places, and government buyers have them displayed for inspection and bid for them, raising the price above their value. They do this not in order to subjugate them, but because it intensifies loyalty, increases power, and is conducive to ardent zeal. They choose from each group, according to what they observe of the characteristics of the race and the tribes. Then they place them in a government barracks where they give them good and fair treatment, educate them, have them taught the Qurʾān and kept at their religious studies until they have a firm grasp of this. Then they train them in archery and fencing, in horsemanship, in hippodromes,

and in thrusting with the lance and striking with the sword until their arms grow strong and their skills become firmly rooted. When the masters know that they have reached the point when they are ready to defend them, even to die for them, they double their pay and increase their grants [*iqṭā'*], and impose on them the duty to improve themselves in the use of weapons and in horsemanship, and so also to increase the number of men of their own race in the service for that purpose. Often they use them in the service of the state, appoint them to high state offices, and some of them are chosen to sit on the throne of the Sultans and direct the affairs of the Muslims, in accordance with divine providence and with the mercy of God to His creatures. Thus, one intake comes after another and generation follows generation, and Islam rejoices in the benefit which it gains through them, and the branches of the kingdom flourish with the freshness of youth.

Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406)¹

While the strangeness of a slave-king system has a particular fascination in its own right, the Mamlūk sultanate of Egypt and Syria played a more important role in world history than its slave origins or exotic appearance might suggest, as indicated not only by the comments above of the north African historian-philosopher Ibn Khaldūn, a contemporary observer and one of the keenest political analysts of the medieval period, but also by modern historians who have the advantage of hindsight.² From the perspective of institutional history, most of what we know about the mamlūk institution itself is based on the relatively well-documented Mamlūk period in which it reached its apogee. In no small measure it was this institution, as embodied in the Mamlūk sultanate of Egypt and Syria, which enabled the Arabic-speaking lands of the Middle East not only to extirpate the crusaders but also to thwart the Mongol advance. The repercussions of these achievements on the surrounding region and on world history in general, were significant. Partly under the pressure of the Mongol invasions, the Bahri mamlūks succeeded in bringing about the political and military union of Egypt and Syria which lasted even beyond 1517. The frontier established between Mamlūk and Mongol territory as a result of Mamlūk resistance remains to this day roughly the boundary between the Arabic-speaking and

¹ 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-'ibar wa diwān al-mubtadā wa'l-khabar* (Bulāq, 1284/1867), V, 371, trans. Bernard Lewis, *Islam from the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople, I: Politics and War* (Oxford, 1987), 97–99. Cf. David Ayalon, "Mamlūkiyyāt: (B) Ibn Khaldūn's View of the Mamlūk Phenomenon," in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, II (Jerusalem, 1980), 340–49, reprinted in idem, *Outsiders in the Lands of Islam* (London, 1988), X, 340–49.

² For example, David Ayalon, "Aspects of the Mamlūk Phenomenon: a) The Importance of the Mamlūk Institution," *Der Islam*, 53 (1976), 197, reprinted in idem, *The Mamlūk Military Society* (London, 1979), Xa, 197.

the Persian cultural zones. The commercial importance of the Mamlūk period, in which Egypt played a key role in the transit trade in spices and not only harboured its own textile industry, but was the source of many raw materials necessary to that industry and so essential to the development of the west, should not be underestimated. "Much of what we think of as distinctively Islamic was not really the product of some earlier and rather notional 'Golden Age of Islam', under the first four caliphs, or the 'Abbāsids, or the Fāṭimids. Rather the shape of such things as the layout of Cairo, the structure and content of the Arabian Nights and the development of dervish orders are really products of the Mamlūk age."³ One might add that some important developments in modern Islam may be traced to the impact of such figures as Ibn Taymiyya who flourished during this period.

Origins of the Mamlūk or military slave institution and the establishment of the Bahṛī Mamlūk sultanate

Among the several words in Arabic for "slave" (such as *'abd*, *khādim*, or *ghulām*), the passive participle "*mamlūk*", derived from the verbal root *m-l-k* (to own) and meaning something which is owned, came to denote a slave, and even more particularly a military slave. The Mamlūk sultanate thus refers to the regime which ruled Egypt and Syria from 1250 to 1517 in which mamlūks (military slaves), individuals of servile origin, constituted the ruling élite.

Two conditions favoured the emergence of the Bahṛī Mamlūk sultanate: the evolved state of the mamlūk institution in the thirteenth century,⁴ and the nascent political hegemony of Egypt in the region and its vital role in a global trade system. Without several other catalysts of an ad hoc nature, however, the result might have been very different indeed. These catalysts were: al-Šāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb's responses to the problems of his reign, which altered established patterns of rule; his death in the midst of a military crisis; the subsequent murder of his son and heir to the throne Tūrān-Shāh; and the crusader and Mongol threats.

For a thousand years, from the ninth until the nineteenth century, the mamlūk institution was a prominent feature of nearly all Islamic societies. Young men were recruited from pagan lands to meet the requirements of Muslim rulers for military manpower of a particular kind. With ties to their families and homelands severed not only by distance, but also by the bestowal of new, usually Turkish, names, coupled nearly always with the nondescript Arabic name "ibn 'Abd Allāh" (son of the slave [or servant] of

³ Robert Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages: The Early Mamlūk Sultanate 1250-1382* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1986), introduction.

⁴ Irwin, *Middle East*, passim.

God), symbolizing the erasure of the past and the humiliating lack of lineage in a lineage-based society, such young recruits were made dependent on, and theoretically fiercely loyal to, their new master, to whom they would henceforth owe whatever fortune they might find in life. In the words of the Seljuk *wazīr* Nizām al-Mulk (d. 1092) “One obedient slave is better than three hundred sons; for the latter desire their father’s death, the former his master’s glory.”⁵ In the best of circumstances these young men were taught the rudiments of Islam, to which they were eventually converted, thus making them “insiders,” a factor which distinguishes them from mercenaries who remain “outsiders,”⁶ and given military training. During the Mamlūk sultanate, if not before, the training period resulted in conversion and manumission. Yet the bonds between the mamlūk and his master remained strong, and the recruit, now free, retained his mamlūk and, therefore, elite status.

Because of its universality and longevity, some scholars have speculated that the mamlūk system was in some way an outgrowth of Islamic civilization, if not of Islam.⁷ A variety of theories for its prominence have been advanced: manpower shortages;⁸ technological advances such as the introduction of the stirrup which made cavalry who used this device particularly desirable;⁹ Muslim withdrawal from political life because of its failure to approximate an Islamic ideal;¹⁰ a means to preserve nomad vitality;¹¹ and the evolution of an elite more interested in commercial life than in military affairs.¹² There is no simple answer to the question of why the mamlūk institution gained such importance in Islamic civilization.¹³

The predominance of Turkish mamlūks also seems to result from a combination of factors. The frontier with Turkestan was more permeable to Islamic ideas and population movement than other frontiers established as a

⁵ *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings: The Siyar al-Muluk or Siyasat-nama*, trans. Hubert Darke (London, 1960), 117.

⁶ Daniel Pipes, *Slave Soldiers and Islam: The Genesis of a Military System* (New Haven, London, 1981), 23.

⁷ David Ayalon, “Preliminary Remarks on the Mamlūk Military Institution in Islam,” in V. J. Parry and M. E. Yapp (eds.), *War, Technology and Society in the Middle East* (Oxford, 1975), 44, reprinted in idem, *Mamlūk Military Society*, IX, 44. See also Pipes, *Slave Soldiers*, 54–102.

⁸ Ayalon, “Preliminary Remarks,” 44, reprinted in idem, *Mamlūk Military Society*, IX, 44.

⁹ Pipes, *Slave Soldiers*, 55–57.

¹⁰ Pipes, *Slave Soldiers*, xviii–xix, 62. See also Patricia Crone, *Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge, 1980), 57, 63.

¹¹ David Ayalon, “The Muslim City and the Mamlūk Military Aristocracy,” *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities*, 14 (1967), 2, 313, reprinted in idem, *Studies on the Mamlūks of Egypt (1250–1517)* (London, 1977), VII, 313.

¹² Pipes, *Slave Soldiers*, 71.

¹³ Irwin, *Middle East*, 7–10, where these theories are discussed with insight.

consequence of the early Arab conquests.¹⁴ Turkish slaves were used as early as Umayyad times¹⁵ but were not recruited systematically or in large numbers until the ninth century, when Transoxiana was finally subdued and Islamized and the 'Abbāsīd caliph in Baghdād, al-Mu'taṣim (833–42), carried out military reforms which, among other things, allowed him to replace Arabs with mamlūks, and in particular Turkish mamlūks, whose military qualities and skills – hardiness, horsemanship and archery – were increasingly in demand. The central Asian steppes provided a vast recruiting ground for Turkish (broadly defined) mamlūks who, as pagans, were eligible, according to Muslim law, for enslavement.¹⁶ Although Turkish mamlūks were used in Egypt as early as the Tūlunīd period and subsequently by the Ikhshīdids and Fātimids, they were not as important an element in the Egyptian armies as in the armies of some other regions of the Islamic world until the Ayyūbīd period. Their increased use in Egypt in Ayyūbīd times appears to be related to the change which occurred in the structure of Islamic armies during the Seljuk period in Iraq and Persia, when a cavalry-based military organization, which also relied heavily on mamlūks, replaced an infantry-based structure composed of non-mamlūk troops.¹⁷ The cavalry was usually composed of horsemen of Turkish origin, and the Ayyūbids brought their Seljuk heritage, including the cavalry-based army comprised mainly of Turks, with them to Egypt.¹⁸ Thus, from the days of Shirkūh (d. 1169), the Kurdish vassal of the Syrian prince Nūr al-Dīn (hero of the counter-Crusade), and his nephew Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (d. 1193) on, Turkish mamlūks played an increasingly prominent role in the Ayyūbīd army of Egypt.¹⁹

During the reign of the last Ayyūbīd sultan al-Ṣāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb (1240–49) the use of Turkish cavalry was further accelerated, to the point that the Turkish predominance countered a previous preference among Muslim rulers for a racially and ethnically diverse army whose various

¹⁴ David Ayalon, "Aspects: a) Importance," 196–204, reprinted in idem, *Mamlūk Military Society*, Xa, 196–204.

¹⁵ Ayalon, "Aspects: a) Importance," 205, reprinted in idem, *Mamlūk Military Society*, Xa, 205. See his "Preliminary Remarks," 46, reprinted in idem, *Mamlūk Military Society*, IX, 46.

¹⁶ Ayalon, "Aspects: a) Importance," 203, reprinted in idem, *Mamlūk Military Society*, Xa, 203. Also David Ayalon, "The European-Asiatic Steppe: A Major Reservoir of Power for the Islamic World," in *Actes du XXVe Congrès International des Orientalistes*, II (Moscow, 1963), 47–52, reprinted in idem, *Mamlūk Military Society*, VIII, 47–52.

¹⁷ David Ayalon, "From Ayyubids to Mamlūks," *REI*, 49 (1981), 43–44, reprinted in idem, *Islam and the Abode of War* (London, 1984), III, 43–44.

¹⁸ Jere L. Barcharach, "African Military Slaves in the Medieval Middle East: The Cases of Iraq (869–955) and Egypt (868–1171)," *IJMES*, 13 (1981), 488–91.

¹⁹ David Ayalon, "Aspects of the Mamlūk Phenomenon: b) Ayyubids, Kurds and Turks," *Der Islam*, 54 (1977), 1–32, reprinted in idem, *Mamlūk Military Society*, Xb, 1–32.

factions might be played off against each other.²⁰ Al-Šāliḥ purchased Turkish mamlūks in larger numbers than any of his predecessors, perhaps out of racial preference, but more likely because horsemanship was now the critical factor in the cavalry-based army, and also because at this moment Turkish slave recruits were in especially abundant supply as a result of the Mongol invasions which were sweeping across the Kipchak steppes of western Asia and southern Russia, creating large pools of captives who found themselves on the slave market. Slaves might, however, also be acquired by other means, such as by purchase from dispossessed peoples who, out of necessity, or hoping to improve their fortune, sold their children into slavery, or as gifts.

Soon after coming to power, al-Šāliḥ Ayyūb purchased between 800 and 1,000 mamlūks, primarily of Kipchak Turkish origin, and with them created his elite Bahri regiment, so named because it was quartered in the fortress complex built by the sultan on Rawḍa island in the Nile river (Baḥr al-Nīl) near Cairo. They are referred to in the sources both as “al-Baḥriyya” to distinguish them from other of al-Šāliḥ’s regiments, and as “al-Baḥriyya-al-Šāliḥiyya,” to indicate their relationship to al-Šāliḥ Ayyūb, their master.

In retrospect it is clear that the formation of this regiment, which acted as al-Šāliḥ’s personal bodyguard, constituted the first step in the ascent of the Baḥriyya mamlūks to the throne. The Bahri regiment formed the powerful, élite corps of the emergent Mamlūk army. The Baḥriyya and their descendants (by birth or mamlūk ties) would dominate the ruling structure of Egypt and Syria during the second half of the thirteenth century and all but the last decade of the fourteenth.²¹ It is of some interest and importance to note furthermore that at least three members of this regiment, two of whom would attain the sultanate (Baybars and Qalāwūn), hailed from the same Kipchak tribe.

As a consequence of the political and territorial fragmentation of the ‘Abbāsīd empire during the ninth and tenth centuries, Egypt gained greater political and economic independence and began to thrive culturally as well. Even prior to the crusades Egypt, because of its location, had begun to play a pivotal role in east–west trade, a role which it continued during the crusades, and which was undoubtedly advanced by them. During the crusading period Egypt also came to be viewed by both sides as the key to their respective political and military goals, which included the domination

²⁰ Amalia Levanoni, “The Mamlūks’ Ascent to Power in Egypt,” *SI*, 33 (1990), 124–5. On the preference for racially diverse armies see, for example, Clifford Edmund Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids: Their Empire in Afghanistan and Eastern Iran 994/1040* (Edinburgh, 1963), 107.

²¹ David Ayalon, “Le régiment Bahriya dans l’armée mamelouke,” *REI*, 19 (1951), 133–41; R. Stephen Humphreys, “The Emergence of the Mamlūk Army,” *Studia Islamica*, 45 (1977), 67–99, and 46 (1977), 147–82.

of Syria.²² Though the degree of Syro-Egyptian unity achieved by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn was threatened by his division of the Ayyūbid realm among family members at his death, Egypt emerged ever more strongly during the power struggles which ensued as the dominant power in the region. Under al-Ṣālīḥ Ayyūb power was further centralized in Egypt.²³ Following his death the political status of the mamlūks in Egypt was confirmed by the results of the battle of Kurā' in 1251, which brought them victory over the Ayyūbid prince al-Nāṣir Yūsuf of Damascus, and by the treaty subsequently signed in 1253, which gave *de facto* recognition to the ending of Ayyūbid rule and to the Mamlūk claim to Egypt.²⁴ Syria, however, fell definitively into Egyptian hands only as a result of the Mamlūk victory at 'Ayn Jālūt in 1260. Syria did not accept the situation complacently. Twice, during the reigns of Baybars and Qalāwūn, would-be sultans among their *khushdāshiyya* (comrades in purchase, training and manumission)²⁵ exploited Syrian regional sentiments to gain support for their bids for the throne by attempting to make Syria independent, or semi-independent, as in Ayyūbid times. Toward the end of his reign al-Nāṣir Muḥammad may have been motivated to cause the demise of his *nā'ib* in Damascus, Tankiz, by the latter's ambitions in Syria, now most probably viewed as a stepping stone to the throne of Egypt.

The crusader presence and Mongol invasions required a military response and the Baḥriyya were positioned to provide it. The regiment first proved its mettle in battle against the crusading forces of the French king Louis IX at Maṣūra on the Egyptian coast in 1249,²⁶ and even more significantly in their victory over the Mongols at 'Ayn Jālūt in 1260. As a result of these victories the Baḥriyya came to be widely perceived by Muslims as the saviours of Islam. It was al-Ṣālīḥ Ayyūb's death, however, during Louis IX's invasion of Egypt, which propelled the Baḥrī regiment onto the political stage as well. In the political void left by the sultan's death and by that soon thereafter of his general Fakhr al-Dīn ibn Shaykh al-Shuyūkh, and then by

²² David Ayalon, "Egypt as the Dominant Factor in Syria and Palestine during the Islamic Period," in Ammon Cohen and Gabriel Baer (eds.), *Egypt and Palestine – A Millennium of Association (868–1948)* (Jerusalem, 1984), 31–32, reprinted in idem, *Outsiders*, II, 31–32.

²³ R. Stephen Humphreys, *Saladin to the Mongols: The Ayyubids of Damascus, 1193–1260* (Albany, 1977), esp. 1–13, and 299–301; Levanoni, "Mamlūks' Ascent," 121, 127–29, 135.

²⁴ On the significance of this battle and treaty see Levanoni, "Consolidation of Aybak's Rule: An Example of Factionalism in the Mamlūk State," *Der Islam*, 71 (1995), 246–47.

²⁵ On *khushdāshiyya*, see David Ayalon, "L'Esclavage du mamelouk," *Oriental Notes and Studies*, 1 (1951), 29–31; reprinted in idem, *Mamlūk Military Society*, I, 29–31. See also Irwin, *Middle East*, 88–90, 154–55.

²⁶ See, for example, David Ayalon, "Studies on the Transfer of the 'Abbasid Caliphate from Baghdad to Cairo," *Arabica*, 7 (1960), 58, regarding Ibn Wāṣil's assessment of Mamlūk prestige following this battle, and idem, 59, for references to their reputation after 'Ayn Jālūt.

the incompetence of his son and heir Tūrān-Shāh (1249–50), which also led to the latter's murder, the Bahriyya emerged as a strong factional contender for the throne.²⁷

Contemporary sources tend to view Egyptian history as a continuum and the Bahri mamlūks as the natural heirs of the Ayyūbids.²⁸ But how did they see themselves? It has been suggested that the Mamlūks were, in fact, reluctant to admit the end of Ayyūbid rule,²⁹ while a counter argument runs that the evidence, including the statement found in a contemporary source, that Baybars wished to reestablish the “state” as it had existed during the reign of al-Šāliḥ Ayyūb, should not be taken at face value; the Bahriyya were, in fact, simply exploiting their Ayyūbid links to give their claim to rule an air of legitimacy. The decisive event was the murder of Tūrān-Shāh (1250), when the Bahriyya acted for the first time, but not the last, as a faction. Perhaps initially the Bahriyya may have sought only to defend their interests (the estates and privileges they had been granted during al-Šāliḥ's rule), but with the throne suddenly in view they began quite deliberately to seek the prize.³⁰ Whatever the case may be, while putting their Ayyūbid heritage to good use, the Bahri mamlūks, from at least the reign of Baybars I on, began not only to consolidate their hold on the sultanate, but also to impress it with their own form and style.

The Bahriyya were not without opposition, however: they would not attain the throne for another decade. First they had to deal with their Ayyūbid opponents as well as with mamlūk rivals. In the meantime, a rather motley assortment of rulers ascended the throne while the factional power struggles, erupting in the wake of the deaths of al-Šāliḥ Ayyūb and Tūrān-Shāh, were fought out.³¹ With both Tūrān-Shāh and Fakhr al-Dīn ibn Shaykh al-Shuyūkh, commander of al-Šāliḥ's armies, dead, Shajarat al-Durr, of Turkish slave origin, a former concubine, then wife, and now widow of al-Šāliḥ Ayyūb, assumed control with the appearance of Bahri backing. Failing to obtain recognition from al-Nāṣir Yūsuf, the Ayyūbid ruler of Damascus, however, the Bahriyya in May 1250 appointed a mamlūk amīr, Aybak al-Turkumānī, as *atābak al-ʿasākir* (commander-in-chief of the armies), to rule jointly with Shajarat al-Durr. It now seems clear that Aybak, though a Šāliḥī, was not a member of the elite Bahriyya, and had been chosen by them because he was politically weak and could, they thought, be

²⁷ Levanoni, “Mamlūks' Ascent,” 134–44; *idem*, “Consolidation,” 243–56.

²⁸ R. S. Humphreys, “Emergence,” 67–99 and Ayalon, “Ayyūbids to Mamlūks,” 43–57; Levanoni, *Turning Point*, 5–6.

²⁹ Irwin, *Middle East*, 26.

³⁰ Levanoni, “Mamlūks' Ascent,” 136–42; *idem*, “Consolidation,” 241–54. For other interpretations see Ayalon, “Régiment bahriyya”; Humphreys, “Emergence”; P. M. Holt, “Mamlūks,” *El2*, VI, 321; Crone, *Slaves*, 261, n. 631.

³¹ Levanoni, “Consolidation,” 241–54.

replaced by one of their own as soon as a consensus emerged regarding a candidate. Shajar al-Durr abdicated in July 1250 and Aybak was raised to the sultanate. But only a few days later, perhaps compelled by the Bahriyya, he stepped down in favour of the even more malleable al-Ashraf Mūsā, a young Ayyūbid prince, who was now nominally recognized as sultan. However, in 1254 Aybak was returned to the sultanate: at some point he had married Shajar al-Durr, thereby strengthening his grip on power. The marriage, however, was doomed by political jealousy and resulted in their murder in 1257. Aybak's mamlūks, the Mu'izziyya, now led by Quṭuz, installed Aybak's young son by another wife, 'Alī, as sultan. Using the imminent Mongol invasion as a pretext, however, Quṭuz usurped the sultanate.

In the meantime most of the Bahriyya had fled Egypt in the wake of the murder in 1254 at Aybak's behest of his rival, the Bahriyya leader Fāris al-Dīn Aqtāy al-Jamdār. The Bahriyya in exile, led by the amīr and future sultan Baybars al-Bunduqdārī, did not forget this treachery. Though these two hostile factions were reconciled in the face of the Mongol invasion of Syria in 1260, the struggle between them was resolved only by the Bahriyya's murder in 1260 of Quṭuz, who had struck the fatal blow against their former leader Fāris al-Dīn Aqtāy. Though lacking unanimous support even among his *khushdāshiyya*, Baybars, as leader of the Bahriyya and a participant in the coup, became sultan of Egypt. On the basis of the accomplishments of his relatively long reign (1260–77), Baybars, who took the regnal title "al-Malik al-Zāhir," is considered the real founder of the Bahri Mamlūk sultanate.

"Bahri" is the name commonly assigned to this dynasty by western historians. This name, of course, derives from the Bahri regiment whose members dominated the political, economic and military structure of the empire during the last half of the thirteenth century and whose descendants (natural or mamlūk) continued to rule, at least nominally, during most of the fourteenth. On the other hand, as has been recently pointed out, though the beginning of Bahri rule is usually dated to 1250, none of the first five sultans were, in fact, members of the Bahriyya.³² The Arabic sources for the period refer to the dynasty as the *dawlat al-atrāk*, *dawlat al-turk*, or *al-dawla al-turkiyya* (i.e. dynasty of the Turks), in recognition of the racial or ethnic group which predominated in the mamlūk caste during this period, and to distinguish it from the Burjī sultanate in which mamlūks of Circassian origin were ascendant. Yet, to the extent that two members of the Bahri corps, Baybars and Qalāwūn, and their sons and mamlūks dominated the

³² Irwin, *Middle East*, 26–27. Cf. David Ayalon, "al-Bahriyya," *El2*, I, 944; P. M. Holt (*The Age of the Crusades: The Near East from the Eleventh Century to 1517* (London and New York, 1986), 84), who identifies Aybak as a Bahri.

sultanate for a little over a century, and that the Bahri regiment “was the model and inspiration for *al-mamālik al-sultāniyya* (the royal guard) of succeeding generations,”³³ there is perhaps some justification for calling the early period the “Bahri Mamlūk sultanate.”

Though originally slaves themselves, the Bahri sultans and their Circassian successors continued to import slaves, for slavery provided the “framework”³⁴ for recruitment of young men who could then be molded through military training, religious education and conversion to Islam to the needs of the sultanate. Having been a slave was a condition for eligibility to the highest ranks of military society, for it assured selection of the highest-quality military personnel available. The two basic mamlūk relationships, the *ustādh-mamlūk* and *khushdāshiyya* ties, though they might be modified by other factors such as race, ethnicity, ambition and personal interest, constituted a system of loyalties which shaped the Mamlūk political structure and gave it strength. The military slave institution as embodied in the Mamlūk sultanate represents one of the most highly developed versions of that institution in the Islamic world.

The Bahri sultanate may be divided into five periods: 1250–60, the ascent of the Bahriyya to power; 1260–93, the period of consolidation; 1293–1310, a time of factional struggle and political instability; 1310–41, the third reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn; and 1341–90, a period of increasing socio-economic distress and internal political instability which paved the way for the rise of the Circassian dynasty. The decade which began with al-Šāliḥ Ayyūb’s death and ended with the murder of Qutuz gave birth to the Bahri sultanate as already described. This period had coincided with the growing Mongol danger and the continued presence of the crusader kingdoms, factors which would continue to dominate events in the region throughout the rest of the century, and which were also, certainly, largely responsible for the character of the regime and its institutions which evolved in response.

Faced by essentially the same problems, the reigns of the sultans al-Zāhir Baybars I (1260–77), al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn (1279–90) and al-Ashraf Khalil (1290–3), which dominate the second period, reflect a certain unity. The crusader presence, the Mongol threat, the incorporation of Syria, the organization of the empire, and the protection of the trade routes to maintain the flow of slaves, war materials and other essential items as well as luxury goods, constituted the major preoccupations of these rulers and to a large extent determined the activities in which these sultans engaged during their reigns. The period as a whole is characterized by incessant warfare against both adversaries and their allies. During their reigns the

³³ Humphreys, “Emergence,” 99.

³⁴ Irwin, *Middle East*, 4.

remnants of the crusader colonies were systematically attacked until Khalil completed the task with the conquest of Acre in 1291. In the meantime Baybars and Qalāwūn also succeeded in bringing the Mongol advance to a halt while simultaneously hammering away at their allies, including the Armenians and Seljuks of Rūm. Both sultans also sent military expeditions into Upper Egypt and Nubia to secure the trade routes if not to expand the sultanate territorially. At the same time diplomatic relations with friendly and even normally hostile powers were opportunistically cultivated. Under these circumstances the political and institutional structure of Mamlūk rule became increasingly militarized and mamlūkized. Both Baybars and Qalāwūn were members of the original Bahriyya-Šālihiyya corps, who had shared common origins and experiences before ascending to the sultanate. Qalāwūn was the last Šālihi sultan. His son Khalil, who ascended the throne at his father's death, unable to claim Šālihi mamlūk ancestry, emphasized instead his Qalāwūnid ties. Before departing to complete the conquest of Acre begun by his father, Khalil made a state visit to the tomb of his father. Subsequently, Qalāwūn's tomb replaced that of al-Šāliḥ Ayyūb as the site of the ceremony in which new mamlūk officers were commissioned. The "cult" of Qalāwūn had been established and outlived Khalil, who met an untimely end at the hands of some amīrs who felt that they were more entitled to rule.

Khalil's death inaugurated the third period in which factional quarrels dominated the politics of the realm. Though several of the Bahriyya-Šālihiyya survived into the early fourteenth century, the members of this élite corps were now aged, and it is probably partially in light of this fact that younger factions began vying for position. Though Khalil's eight-year-old brother al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ascended to power in 1293, his position was subsequently usurped twice by mamlūk officers who represented the most powerful factions, now defined it would seem as much by racial and ethnic ties as by mamlūk loyalties. Al-ʿĀdil Kitbughā (1294-96), a Manṣūri mamlūk and partisan of Khalil, of Mongol origin, was followed on the throne by the Manṣūri Ḥusām al-Dīn Lājīn (1296-98) of Prussian or Greek origin³⁵ and later by the wealthy, cultured and pious al-Muẓaffar Baybars (II) al-Jāshnikir (1309-10), both of whom are seen as representing Burji-Circassian interests. Thus this period is notable in the first instance for the light it sheds on ethnic and racial ties as factors which cut across *mamlūk-khushdāshiyya* bonds. Of these three sultans, the sequence of whose reigns was interrupted by the second reign of Qalāwūn's son al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (1299-1309), Lājīn's rule is notable for his attempted *rawk* or redistribution of *iqṭāʿāt*, i.e., the assignment of agricultural revenues, perhaps motivated by his desire to gain the upper hand over rival factions by gaining control over resources.

³⁵ Irwin, *Middle East*, 70.

The third reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn (1310–41) is often seen as the apogee of the Bahri sultanate and Mamlūk rule as a whole. The Mamlūk defeat at the hands of the Īlkhānids in 1299 was not allowed to stand; in subsequent encounters, the last of which occurred in 1313, the Mamlūks were victorious. When the Mamlūk-Mongol conflict finally came to an end, however, with the signing of a peace treaty in 1322, the Bahri regime entered a period of relative peace, internal stability and prosperity. Yet it is to this period that the seeds of military decline, and hence the decline of Bahri rule, can be traced. Unfortunately, the political, military and economic reforms instituted by al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, although intended to strengthen his political and economic position, led in the long term to the end of Qalāwūnid and Kipchaki-Turkish rule. The Īlkhānid ruler Abū Saʿīd died soon after and with him the Īlkhānid regime faded into oblivion. In its wake several petty kingdoms (Dhu'l-Qadriids, Karamānids, Germiyanids, and Ottomans in Anatolia and Jalāyirids, Muẓaffarids and Sarbadārs in the east) arose on the former Mamlūk-Īlkhānid frontiers, and Mamlūk diplomatic efforts now turned to establishing beneficial relationships with these new entities.

Upon the death of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad the sultanate once again entered a period of political instability in which no fewer than twelve sultans, all descendants of the late monarch, ascended the throne before the dynasty was finally overthrown by the Circassians in 1390. Unlike al-Nāṣir, however, these sultans, with perhaps the exception of al-Nāṣir Ḥasan (1347–51, 1354–61) and al-Ashraf Shaʿbān (1363–77), all ruled in name only, as the mamlūk leaders of the dominant factions wielded the real power in pursuit of their factional interests. Political instability was exacerbated by social and economic difficulties. The bubonic plague arrived in Egypt in 1347–48 and was followed by bouts of the even more pernicious pneumonic plague: the very high mortality rate resulted in significant social and economic changes. Rivalry over trade in the eastern Mediterranean led to Mamlūk attempts to expand into Armenia, which had succeeded Acre as the western commercial bridgehead to the Orient. The Mamlūk effort, however, was disputed by Cyprus. Motivated by commercial, rather than religious, goals, Peter I of Lusignan, ruler of the crusader kingdom of Cyprus and titular ruler of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, attacked Alexandria in 1365. Additional economic difficulties, a shortage of specie and Egypt's deteriorating position in international trade, further undermined the regime and facilitated the circumstances of revolt. Although it took two attempts, Barqūq succeeded in his bid for the throne and encountered little resistance.

Political, military and administrative structure

The Bahri Mamlūk political structure is perceived in contemporary sources as having had three main divisions – political-military, financial-adminis-

trative and religious-judicial.³⁶ Military posts were held by “men of the sword” – mamlūks; financial posts by “men of the pen” or scribal class, usually native Arabic-speaking Muslim or Coptic civilians; and religio-judicial posts by “men of the turban,” Muslims who normally had some higher training in the religious sciences. In theory, as head of the Muslim community, the caliph stood at the top of the structure. In fact, while the caliph continued to play a symbolic role, it was the sultan in the early Bahrī period and the leading amīrs in the later Bahrī period who exercised real power. Recent research on the position of sultan has focused on four main issues: the concept of the sultanate and the role of the sultan, legitimacy, succession, and factionalism.

The concept of the sultanate and the role of the sultan in the Bahrī period has been studied from at least four perspectives: as seen through events described in the chronicles; as portrayed in royal biographies; as viewed from a legal or juridical point of view through documents such as the *‘ahd* or diploma of investiture; and as reflected in institutional change and court ceremony. The resulting image is one of tension between oligarchy and autocracy. Sultans such as Baybars and Qalāwūn were brought to power by their *khushdāshiyya*. As their peers, *khushdāshiyya* were potential rivals, and sultans brought to power by them ruled only with their consent and were, in fact, restrained by them in their rule.

The early Bahrī sultans played several roles: they were warriors *par excellence* (demonstrated in their campaigns against crusaders, Mongols, their allies, and others), pseudo-tribal chiefs as leaders of mamlūk *khushdāshiyya* and household groups,³⁷ and finally, factional leaders.³⁸ In all roles they were regarded as *primus inter pares*. Qalāwūn’s diploma of investiture, however, which contains the caliph’s full delegation of executive power to the sultan, projects a more autocratic vision of the sultanate. This diploma may be seen as a forerunner of Badr al-Dīn ibn Jamā’a’s (d. 1333) theoretical legal justification for the absorption of the caliphate by the sultanate.³⁹ In practice the increasing centralization of power in the sultanate, culminating in the autocracy of the third reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (1310–41), supports such a view. Yet even with a high degree of centralization, the sultan ruled only with the consent of his amīrs. Qalāwūn, for example, was concerned to recognize the status of his Ṣāliḥī *khushdāshiyya* in his diploma,

³⁶ For an early fourteenth-century statement, see Qirtāy al-‘Izzī al-Khazindārī, trans. Linda S. Northrup, in *Slave to Sultan: The Career of al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn and the Consolidation of Mamlūk Rule in Egypt and Syria, 678–689 A.H./1279–1290 A.D.*, Freiburger Islamstudien (Stuttgart, 1998), 198–200.

³⁷ P. M. Holt, “The Position and Power of the Mamlūk Sultan,” BSOAS, 28 (1975), 247; idem, “Succession in the Early Mamlūk Sultanate,” XXIII, Einar von Schuler (ed.), *Deutscher Orientalistentag, Würzburg, 16–20 September 1985* (Stuttgart, 1989), 145.

³⁸ Irwin, *Middle East*, 154.

³⁹ Northrup, *Slave to Sultan*, 170.

and in the diploma of his son al-Šāliḥ ‘Alī he counselled seeking their advice.⁴⁰ Though autocracy triumphed during al-Nāṣir’s reign, it was rejected after his death when factional struggles resulted in rule by mamlūk coalitions and eventually in the “re-mamlūkization” of the sultanate with the ascent of Barqūq to the throne.

Mamlūks, who were of both pagan and slave origin, suffered a double liability with respect to legitimacy in Muslim eyes, a fact which may help to explain the preoccupation with legitimacy shown by the early Bahrī sultans. Moreover in a society still largely tribal in organization, in which, despite the coming of Islamic egalitarianism, lineage defined a person’s status, Mamlūk rulers of, in most cases, unknown ancestry were considered unworthy of their role. Upon the death of al-Šāliḥ Ayyūb in 1250 the only possible justification for the mamlūk claim to the throne was the prominent role played by the Bahriyya in the victory over Louis IX’s crusader forces at the Battle of Manṣūra near the Egyptian coast. In fact, those whose rule followed al-Šāliḥ groped for ways to establish their title. The Battle of ‘Ayn Jālūt served to consolidate their claim arising from military superiority, and it was, indeed, ultimately their exercise of military might in the protection of Islam and the perception that they were the “saviours of Islam” that provided the real moral basis for mamlūk rule and established their right to rulership.

In the meantime, however, it was necessary to provide a veneer of legality for the regime. In addition to their other socio-legal deficiencies Baybars I and Qalāwūn were both usurpers. Both they and their encomiasts used their ties to their *ustādh* al-Šāliḥ Ayyūb to bolster their claims. The royal biographies of Baybars, Qalāwūn and Khalīl, modeled on the twelfth-century tradition associated with Šalāḥ al-Dīn, portray these sultans as virtuous rulers in the Islamic and Arab tribal tradition, perhaps in an effort to legitimize their status as traditional (and heroic) Islamic rulers.⁴¹ The most flamboyant gesture, however, was Baybars’s installation in 1261, following the fall of Baghdad to the Mongols and the caliph’s execution, of a refugee ‘Abbāsīd as caliph in Cairo with the regnal title al-Mustanṣir (1261), who was succeeded later that year by his kinsman al-Ḥākim I (1261–1302).

The caliph, however, paid a high price for the rescue of his office. In return for this favour, he was obliged to bestow a diploma of investiture on the sultan. While Mamlūk rule gained a semblance of legality, the caliphate existed only by the grace of the sultanate. The caliph was allowed to reign, but not to rule. Although Baybars made a public show of his investiture, it is

⁴⁰ Northrup, *Slave to Sultan*, 185, 243.

⁴¹ P. M. Holt, “The Virtuous Ruler in Thirteenth-Century Mamlūk Royal Biographies,” *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 24 (1980), 27–35; idem, “Three Biographies of al-Zāhir Baybars,” in D. O. Morgan (ed.), *Medieval Historical Writing in the Christian and Islamic Worlds* (London, 1982), 19–29.

less certain that Qalāwūn did so, in spite of the fact that a copy of the latter's diploma has been preserved. Qalāwūn's diploma, with the statement that "everything that God entrusted to our lord, the prince of the believers with respect to sovereignty on earth . . . shall henceforth be delegated to his exalted excellency, the sultan, al-Malik al-Manṣūr . . ." ⁴² legalizes the sultan's usurpation of caliphal authority. Indeed, during Qalāwūn's reign and much of the rest of the Bahrī period the caliph lived in a state of honorable house arrest. Al-Nāṣir actually arrested the caliph al-Mustakfi in 1336 and imprisoned him along with his family in a tower at the Citadel before exiling him to Qūṣ. ⁴³ At the accession of al-Nāṣir Aḥmad to the throne in 1342, it was not al-Nāṣir who took the oath of allegiance to the caliph, but the caliph who performed the oath of allegiance (*bay'a*) to the sultan. ⁴⁴ By the reign of the last Qalāwūnid sultan Ḥājji (1389), the caliph was regarded as no more exalted in rank than the chief judges of the four Sunnī *madhhabs*. ⁴⁵ Though the caliphate apparently remained indispensable as a symbol, the sultanate had gained control over the highest office of the Sunnī religious institution. Legal scholars adjusted the theory of the caliphate accordingly. Badr al-Dīn ibn Jamā'a (1241-1333) accepted usurpation of caliphal authority, deeming tyranny preferable to disorder. ⁴⁶ Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) ignored the institution altogether; his primary concern was that the "Sharī'a [be] the supreme authority, the exclusive and complete guide of the 'umma' of Islam . . ." The caliphate was not necessary as long as the ruler, whoever he might be, recognized the authority of the *Sharī'a*. ⁴⁷ Ibn Taymiyya perhaps saw the demise of the caliph as an opportunity for the '*ulamā'*': they, rather than the caliph or the sultan, would ultimately determine what the law was. ⁴⁸

The mamlūk institution, at least in part originating in the need to preserve nomadic vitality in the interests of military superiority, required that the mamlūk elite continually recreate itself through the importation of fresh recruits. Thus the sultanate was inherently a one-generation military aristocracy. Yet the principle of a non-hereditary nobility can only be inferred, since nothing in the sources indicates the existence of a formal regulation to

⁴² Aḥmad ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Qalqashandī, *Subḥ al-a'shā fi ṣinā'at al-inshā'*, 14 vols. (Cairo, 1913-20; reprinted 1963), X, 102; Northrup, *Slave to Sultan*, 167.

⁴³ Ḥayāt Nāṣir al-Ḥājji, *The Internal Affairs in Egypt during the Third Reign of al-Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn, 709-741/1309-1341* (Kuwait, 1978), 27-28.

⁴⁴ P. M. Holt, "Some Observations on the 'Abbasid Caliphate of Cairo," *BSOAS*, 47 (1984), 504.

⁴⁵ P. M. Holt, "The Structure of Government in the Mamlūk Sultanate," in idem (ed.), *The Eastern Mediterranean Lands in the Period of the Crusades* (Warminster, 1977), 45.

⁴⁶ E. I. J. Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam* (Cambridge, 1962), 44-45.

⁴⁷ Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 52.

⁴⁸ Rosenthal, *Political Thought*, 55-56.

this effect, except perhaps for the statement in the diploma delivered by al-Mustakfi to Baybars I, “that kingship is childless . . .”⁴⁹ At the highest political levels, however, the principle was not strictly respected, for it conflicted with the natural desires of mamlūk fathers to bequeath their status and wealth to their non-mamlūk sons (*awlād al-nās*). Both Baybars and Qalāwūn named their sons as heirs to the throne, though only Qalāwūn was successful in establishing a dynasty. This dynasty eventually included not only his sons and direct descendants but also, in the cases of the sultans Kitbughā, Lājīn and Baybars II al-Jāshnikir, mamlūks of his household. After the death in 1341 of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (who is said to have named his son as heir only under duress),⁵⁰ Qalāwūn’s descendants, excepting perhaps al-Nāṣir Ḥasan (1347–51, 1354–61) and al-Ashraf Shaʿbān (1363–77), ruled in name only; real power was exercised by the leading amīrs of the dominant faction.

The ambiguity inherent in a system in which a nominal sultanate provided a facade for the rule of the amīrs has stimulated discussion over the degree to which succession in the Bahri period was hereditary or dynastic as opposed to non-hereditary, elective, and oligarchic.⁵¹ While a written rule regarding the non-hereditary, one-generation elite nature of the sultanate did not exist, and neither did there develop “any explicit theory of hereditary succession, still less of primogeniture,”⁵² the theory of the one-generation elite was really put to test, as has been noted, when it came to preventing the elite from passing on economic wealth and influence. Though the Bahri sultanate may have tried to institutionalize a non-hereditary system through, for example, centralized control of *iqṭāʿāt* and confiscation, its efforts were not entirely successful, for the mamlūk élite had discovered a loophole provided by the *waqf* (pious endowment) system. Thus the dynastic impulse was stronger than is evident from the point of view of sultani succession alone: “the Bahri state, even in its frail last decade . . . had been solidly built on a disproportionate share of the house of Qalāwūn in the wealth of Egypt.”⁵³ Finally, the possibility that Turkish custom regarding regicide played a role in the succession process has been raised. Finding some evidence in this regard for Baybars I’s election to the sultanate, Haarmann suggests that the repeated depositions of sultans were, in fact, “regicide” symbolically transformed.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Holt, “Some Observations,” 505.

⁵⁰ Amalia Levanoni, “The Mamlūk Conception of the Sultanate,” *IJMES*, 26 (1994), 380.

⁵¹ The various points of view are well summarized in Levanoni, “Mamlūk Conception,” 373–92.

⁵² Irwin, *Middle East*, 156.

⁵³ Ulrich Haarmann, “The Sons of Mamlūks as Fief-holders in Late Medieval Egypt,” in Tarif Khalidi (ed.), *Land Tenure and Social Transformation in the Middle East* (Beirut, 1984), 163.

⁵⁴ Ulrich Haarmann, “Regicide and the Law of the Turks,” in Michel M. Mazzaoui and

Mamlūk politics have frequently been viewed as primarily a function of mamlūk loyalties (i.e. the *khushdāshiyya* and *ustādh-mamlūk* relationships), the glue which bound mamlūk factions. The Bahriyya, mamlūks of the same master, who were additionally mainly of Kipchak origin and thus also ethnically homogeneous, first acted as a faction when their interests were threatened by Tūrān-Shāh, who too swiftly moved to replace them with his own, junior mamlūks. The generational pattern of the junior amīrs of a new sultan posing a challenge to the political power and economic status of senior mamlūks of the household of a former sultan is seen throughout Mamlūk history. The Bahriyya, for example, revolted against Tūrān-Shāh because they wanted to preserve their estates.⁵⁵ Qalāwūn usurped the sultanate because Bahri-Šālihi interests were again threatened by the ascent of the mamlūks of Baybars's heir al-Malik al-Sa'id as well as by the Zāhiriyya, Baybars's mamlūk corps.⁵⁶ Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad hated the Manṣūriyya, his father's mamlūks, and contrived to rid himself of most of them.⁵⁷ Usually, though not always (as in the case of Qalāwūn's descendants) raised to the throne by his *khushdāshiyya*, a new sultan's hold on power ultimately depended on his replacing these senior amīrs with mamlūks of his own younger household whose loyalty was, at least in theory, unquestioned. Baybars I, Qalāwūn, and al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (in his third reign) were successful because they had been able to build up large households of mamlūks and knew how to manipulate the factions.

Although mamlūk loyalties were indeed important, they do not explain all factional liaisons. Ethnic ties, for example, often cut across mamlūk factions, as is evident in the alignments which emerged between the death of Khalīl (d. 1293) and the inauguration of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's third reign in 1310, when Circassian and Mongol mamlūks tended to belong to different coalitions. Qalāwūn, it should be noted, either to counter the Kipchak predominance or possibly to supplement the supply of Kipchaks who were, perhaps, no longer in such abundance, began importing Circassian mamlūks in large numbers. As sultan, he created a new regiment, known as the Burjiyya because it was quartered in the towers (*burj*) of the Cairo citadel, to which he is said to have assigned about 3,700 of his mamlūks of Circassian and Abkhāzī origin. Factions eventually developed within the Manṣūriyya which were supported by other elements in the army and in society at large. Whereas Kitbughā, Qalāwūn's mamlūk of Mongol origin, rose to the sultanate at least in part as a representative of the interests of *wāfidiyya*

Vera B. Moreen (eds.), *Intellectual Studies on Islam: Essays Written in Honor of Martin B. Dickson* (Salt Lake City, 1990), 127–35.

⁵⁵ Levanoni, "Mamlūks' Ascent," 135, 141.

⁵⁶ Northrup, *Slave to Sultan*, 73–76, 81.

⁵⁷ Reuven Amitai-Preiss, "The Remaking of the Military Elite of Mamlūk Egypt by al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn," *Studia Islamica*, 72 (1990), 145–63.

(immigrants or refugees from Mongol territory who had arrived in the Mamlūk realm),⁵⁸ disaffected Zāhiriyya, Kurdish auxiliaries and *ḥalqa* troops, and non-mamlūk interests, his rival Lājīn gained support from the Maṣṣūriyya-Burjiyya mamlūk elite.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the two basic mamlūk relationships, the *ustādh-mamlūk* and *khushdāshiyya* ties, though they might be modified by other factors such as race, ethnicity, mamlūk and non-mamlūk affiliations, ambition and interests, constituted a system of loyalties that helped to shape and strengthen the Mamlūk political structure. Still to be determined is whether factions and inter-factional coalitions were simply rooted in ambition and self-interest, as it would now appear, or whether they may ultimately have had some moral or ideological basis.⁶⁰

The basis of sultani power was the army, and the sultan was of course commander-in-chief. The senior amīrs holding the rank of *amīr mi'a muqaddam alf* (amīr of 100 with command on the battlefield of 1,000 *ḥalqa* troops), ideally twenty-four in number, formed an executive military council. Mamlūks filled all major military posts, positions in the palace administration and senior urban offices. Baybars I, under the threat of Mongol attack, clearly devoted energy to strengthening the Mamlūk army numerically, reorganizing the *barīd* (military post and intelligence system), strengthening fortifications, encouraging military readiness through *furūsiyya* exercises (games and training in horsemanship, archery and other military skills), trying to build a navy, and introducing (unsuccessfully) innovations such as fighting elephants.⁶¹ There is no clear evidence, however, that as sultan either he or his immediate successors undertook a major reorganization of the Mamlūk army, as has sometimes been stated.⁶² The early Mamlūk army shows a great deal of continuity with its Ayyūbid predecessor, the mamlūk element, always a minority, constituting in both periods the backbone of the army. The élite *ḥalqa* corps, composed of such high-ranking free-born troops as *awlād al-nās* and *wāfidiyya*, retained that status in the Mamlūk period until the reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. The

⁵⁸ David Ayalon, "The Wafidiyya in the Mamlūk Kingdom," *Islamic Culture*, 25 (1951), 89–104; reprinted in idem, *Studies on the Mamlūks*, VII, 313.

⁵⁹ Irwin, *Middle East*, 88–104. For an example of the limits of mamlūk loyalties see Amalia Levanoni, *A Turning Point in Mamlūk History: The Third Reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad Ibn Qalāwūn (1310–1341)* (Leiden, 1995), 33.

⁶⁰ Irwin, *Middle East*, 152–56; idem, "Factions in Medieval Egypt," *JRAS* (1986), 228–46.

⁶¹ Reuven Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamlūks: The Mamlūk-Ilkhānīd War, 1260–1281* (Cambridge, 1995), 71–75; Peter Thorau, *The Lion of Egypt: Sultan Baybars I and the Near East in the Thirteenth Century*, trans. P. M. Holt (London and New York, 1987), 99; Ayalon, "Ayyubids to Mamlūks," 50; reprinted in idem, *Islam and the Abode of War*, III, 50. On the use of elephants see Bosworth, *Ghaznavids*, 115–19.

⁶² Humphreys, "Emergence," *Studia Islamica*, 45 (1977), 67–99 and 46 (1977), 147–8; cf. Ayalon, "Ayyubids to Mamlūks," 50–55, reprinted in idem, *Islam and the Abode of War*, III, 50–55.

tulb remained the basic battle, or parade, formation throughout both periods. The rather loose ranking system characteristic of the Ayyūbid army is also found in the early Mamlūk army. Only gradually did the ranks evolve into the more rigid, three-tiered system of the later period, comprising the highest rank of *amīr mi'a muqaddam alf*, *amīr tabalkhāna* (amīr of forty) and *amīr 'ashara* (amīr of ten).⁶³ Though the mamlūk military chain of command was not as elaborate as that of the Mongol army,⁶⁴ the Mamlūk system of loyalties perhaps served the purpose to a degree.

On the other hand, although it is nowhere explicitly stated in the sources, there are indications that Baybars and Qalāwūn systematized the military structure. Whereas the Ayyūbid army had consisted of disparate elements brought together as need arose, Baybars, following 'Ayn Jālūt, created a "discrete framework for a single army which he made subordinate to the central government."⁶⁵ Both he and Qalāwūn also introduced changes "which established a clear formal link between a soldier's rank and the size of his *iqṭā'*."⁶⁶ The early Mamlūk army thus consisted of three main elements: the Royal Mamlūks – the mamlūks belonging to the sultan (*al-mamālik al-sultāniyya*); the mamlūks of the amīrs (*mamālik al-umarā'* or *al-ajnad*);⁶⁷ and the *ḥalqa* corps.⁶⁸ The Royal Mamlūks and *ḥalqa* were made subordinate to the sultan, while the amīr's troops, though under the authority of an amīr, were to be placed at the disposal of the regime whenever necessary.⁶⁹ Auxiliary units of free Kurdish, Turkoman and Bedouin Arab troops were also used in battle.⁷⁰ Among them the Arabs of northern Syria were most important, as is clear from the fact that they were actually granted an amirate.⁷¹ The sultan's guard (*khāṣṣakiyya*) was chosen from the Royal Mamlūks.⁷² Royal Mamlūks filled most household or palace positions such as those of the *hājib* (chamberlain), *ustādār* (major domo), *amīr akhūr* (amīr in charge of the stables), and the *khāzindār* (the official in

⁶³ Levanoni, *Turning Point*, 10. Cf. David Ayalon, "Studies on the Structure of the Mamlūk Army – II," *BSOAS*, 15 (1954), 467–75, reprinted in *idem*, *Studies on the Mamlūks*, I, 467–75.

⁶⁴ E.g., Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamlūks*, 214–25.

⁶⁵ Levanoni, *Turning Point*, 8–9.

⁶⁶ Levanoni, *Turning Point*, 10–11.

⁶⁷ Ayalon, "Studies – II," 459–67; reprinted in *idem*, *Studies on the Mamlūks*, I, 459–67.

⁶⁸ On the *ḥalqa*, see Ayalon, "Studies – II," 448–59; reprinted in *idem*, *Studies on the Mamlūks*, I, 448–59.

⁶⁹ Levanoni, *Turning Point*, 8.

⁷⁰ David Ayalon, "The Auxiliary Forces of the Mamlūk Sultanate," *Der Islam*, 45 (1988), 13–37, reprinted in *idem*, *Mamlūk Military Society*, Xa, 196–225.

⁷¹ M. A. Hiyari, "The Origins and Development of the Amirate of the Arabs during the Seventh/Thirteenth and Eighth/Fourteenth Centuries," *BSOAS*, 38 (1975), 509–24.

⁷² David Ayalon, "Studies on the Structure of the Mamlūk Army – I," *BSOAS*, 15 (1953), 213–16, reprinted in *idem*, *Studies on the Mamlūks*, I, 213–16.

charge of the royal treasure), among others.⁷³ The superiority of the Royal Mamlūk corps and its elite status were reinforced by the recruitment and selection procedures and the resources available for their training and maintenance, which gave the sultan the advantage over the amīrs who formed their own households, though on a smaller scale. Whether because the supply of Kipchak recruits was drying up or because his aim was to balance Kipchak mamlūks with other ethnic groups, Qalāwūn endeavoured to obtain mamlūks from a variety of sources and is said to have selected them on the basis of merit rather than ethnic origin.⁷⁴ Throughout the Bahṛī period the Royal Mamlūks and mamlūk regiments retained their high status, while the *ḥalqa* declined in status and skill during the fourteenth century owing to circumstances discussed below.

The early Bahṛī sultans were concerned to increase the size and strength of the army. This aim is explicitly stated in instructions Qalāwūn left with his son during his absence on campaign.⁷⁵ In fact, Qalāwūn advertised for recruits. Baybars, Qalāwūn and al-Nāṣir Muḥammad successively purchased more mamlūks than their predecessors. The army was based on the *iqṭāʿ* system, i.e. the assignment of revenues mainly from agricultural land for the maintenance of a soldier and a certain number of horsemen.⁷⁶ The maintenance of such a standing army certainly constituted the major expenditure of the state: the early sultans were thus also concerned to increase revenues.

Two factors led to a weakening of the Mamlūk military structure in the fourteenth century: first, paradoxically, the coming of a period of relative peace and prosperity; and second, the structural changes inadvertently introduced by al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn as he sought to meet the challenges of his reign. The military crises of the thirteenth century had demanded discipline. Galvanized by the Mongol threat and the crusader presence, the new Mamlūk regime had insisted on hard training, slow promotion and gradual pay increases. Discipline had instilled a value system in which individual merit and achievement were eventually well rewarded and which made the early mamlūk army the strongest in the region at that time. But with the elimination of the crusader principalities, the signing of the Mamlūk–Mongol peace treaty in 1322 and the disintegration of the Īlkhānid state soon after, the Bahṛī regime entered a period of peace,

⁷³ Irwin, *Middle East*, 39. Also, Jonathan Riley-Smith (ed.), *The Atlas of the Crusades* (London, 1991), 110–11.

⁷⁴ Northrup, *Slave to Sultan*, 188.

⁷⁵ On Baybars; Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamlūks*, 71–3; Thorau, *Lion of Egypt*, 99; on Qalāwūn; Northrup, *Slave to Sultan*, 188; Levanoni (*Turning Point*, 32), however, claims that al-Nāṣir Muḥammad purchased less than his predecessors.

⁷⁶ See Cl. Cahen, “*Ikṭāʿ*,” *EI2*, III, 1088–91; Robert Irwin, “*‘Iqṭāʿ’ and the End of the Crusader States*,” in P. M. Holt (ed.), *The Eastern Mediterranean Lands in the Period of the Crusades* (Warminster, 1977), 62–77; Hassanein Rabie, *The Financial System of Egypt*, AH 564–741/AD 1169–1341 (London, 1972), 26–72.

prosperity and internal stability. The military ethic that had served so well during a time of crisis began to deteriorate. It was further eroded by the ways in which al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (not himself a mamlūk) tried to gain mastery over the mamlūk elite and greater access to and control over economic resources. Al-Nāṣir's ultimately ill-considered efforts to buy loyalty through more liberal pay, rapid promotions and marriage alliances with mamlūks of his own household rather than high-ranking outsiders such as the *Wāfidiyya* and others encouraged a lapse in discipline.⁷⁷ Like his predecessors, he moved as quickly as possible to remove the amīrs of former sultans, and in particular the Manṣūriyya of his father, ruthlessly eliminated potential rivals, and promoted "amirs on whom he could depend, mainly – but not exclusively – his own mamlūks."⁷⁸ Al-Nāṣir began promoting non-mamlūks to senior military posts. Not only were civilians appointed to posts formerly held by the military, but a roster of al-Nāṣir's senior amīrs includes several of non-mamlūk origin.⁷⁹ This trend toward de-mamlūkization, which became increasingly apparent from al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's reign on, was reinforced by the dislike of al-Nāṣir Ḥasan (1347–51, 1354–61) of the mamlūk institution and his extreme preference for the *awlād al-nās* and other non-mamlūk groups.⁸⁰ It was furthered by the arrival of bubonic plague in Egypt in 1347, and subsequently by recurrent epidemics of pneumonic plague that decimated not only the civilian population but the mamlūk ranks of the army.

A second factor that had a negative effect on Mamlūk military organization was the attempt by several sultans to redistribute land and agricultural resources to the benefit of the mamlūk army and to meet the needs of the sultanate. Despite the efforts of Qalāwūn and al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and perhaps others to reclaim unproductive lands, the possibility of agricultural development remained quite limited; the agricultural resources of Egypt were finite. The strain on agricultural resources imposed by a standing army of mamlūk recruits was perhaps felt as early as the end of Qalāwūn's reign, when this sultan launched a program of confiscations so broad in scope that it affected not only the military elite but civilians as well.⁸¹ Qalāwūn's son, Khalīl, at the time of his death seems to have been considering a *rawk* or cadastral survey as a basis for a redistribution,⁸² and Lājīn was on the point of implementing such a program when he was assassinated, partly because of it. Al-Nāṣir finally succeeded in implementing a series of *rawks* in both

⁷⁷ Levanoni, *Turning Point*, 28–80.

⁷⁸ Amitai-Preiss, "Remaking," 145–63.

⁷⁹ Amitai-Preiss, "Remaking," 160.

⁸⁰ Levanoni, *Turning Point*, 49, 86; Haarmann, "Sons of Mamlūks," 162.

⁸¹ Northrup, *Slave to Sultan*, 134–39; Jacqueline Sublet, "La folie de la princesse Bint al-Aṣraf," *BEO*, 27 (1974), 45–50.

⁸² Irwin, *Middle East*, 81–82.

Syria (1313) and Egypt (1315). Rather than strengthening the army, however, al-Nāṣir's *rawk* had the opposite effect. Though it worked to the advantage of the sultan and the Mamlūk elite by giving them a greater share of the revenues, it undermined the military strength and status of the *ḥalqa* corps, which subsequently attracted only riff-raff.⁸³ Finding his situation desperate as a consequence of the redistribution, the *ḥalqa* soldier now might lease his *iqtā'* and do his best to avoid military service. From al-Nāṣir's reign on military training was no longer a prerequisite for membership in the *ḥalqa*. Its ranks now counted elderly and disabled persons, and, after the plague of 1347, even children.⁸⁴

It has been said that the army of the sultanate was the state. But the core of the army was mamlūk. Therefore, the state was both militarized and mamlūkized. The political structure *was* the mamlūk military structure. Major posts in the administration were filled by mamlūks or by civilians supervised by mamlūks. The Bahri sultanate inherited the administrative divisions of the Ayyūbid realm but was much more successful in forging the political and administrative unity of Egypt and Syria by superimposing the more highly centralized Mamlūk military system on the confederal Ayyūbid structure. The mamlūk system with its inherent loyalties and ranks helped to weld these two geographically and historically disparate regions together in what proved to be an extremely durable political union. The nature of rule, previously personal and ephemeral, became institutionalized in the Mamlūk system itself. Mamlūk sultans, unlike Ayyūbid rulers, did not appoint their sons to governorships or to any other administrative position; ideally they appointed at the beginning of their reigns senior mamlūk officers from among their *khushdāshiyya* to these posts, who were then replaced as opportunities arose by the more loyal mamlūks of their own personal households. Nor did they divide their realm among their sons at death. Cairo was the seat of the sultanate and the only major governmental centre in Egypt. Damascus ranked second in importance to Cairo, and its governor (*nā'ib*), usually either the sultan's *khushdāsh* or a mamlūk of his household, was directly responsible to the sultan as were the governors of all smaller administrative centres and garrisons. The sultan also exercised control by means of his prerogative to appoint and dismiss and the fragmentation of responsibilities. Governors of major fortresses, for example, were appointed by, and were directly responsible to, the sultan rather than by the governor of the province.

The civil administration comprised three branches: finance, chancery and religio-judicial affairs. The *nā'ib al-saltāna* (viceroys) of Egypt was after the

⁸³ Haarmann, "Sons of Mamlūks," 142; idem, "Halka," *EI2*, 99; Levanoni, *Turning Point*, 8, esp. n. 14, 106–09, 142–43; Ayalon, "Studies – II," 448–59, reprinted in idem, *Studies on the Mamlūks*, 1, 448–59.

⁸⁴ Levanoni, *Turning Point*, 106–07, 128–31.

sultan the second most powerful government official. He was charged with the overall administration of governmental affairs, including some aspects of finance. In the sultan's absence he was often appointed acting sultan. The *wazīr* was responsible for the financial administration which included such important offices as the bureau of sultani properties (*nazar al-khāṣṣ*) and the army bureau (*diwān al-jaysh*) which was responsible for the distribution of *iqṭā's* as well as for the offices in charge of tax collection. Previously held by a civilian, the wazīrate was militarized during Qalāwūn's reign with the appointment to the post of his mamlūk 'Alam al-Dīn Sanjar al-Shujā'ī. Qalāwūn probably sought to increase his control over revenues in this way; indeed, the *wazīr* proved extremely capable, enriching both himself and the sultan in the process. Eventually, however, al-Shujā'ī's efficiency in filling the coffers undermined goodwill toward this sultan. Al-Nāṣir, also searching for ways to increase his personal control over financial resources, eventually abolished the office altogether. Henceforth, the financial functions of the wazīrate and *niyābat al-salṭana*, which he also abolished, were concentrated in the office of *nāẓir al-khāṣṣ*, thus centralizing control over financial resources in one individual. That individual was usually someone chosen because of his vulnerability, a Copt or Christian convert, whose obedience was assured. Karīm al-Dīn al-Kabīr, a former Copt appointed in 1310, and al-Nashw, also a Coptic convert, appointed in 1333, are prominent examples.⁸⁵

Chancery posts were filled by "men of the pen," who though they had most probably received a religious education, had also frequently served an apprenticeship as a government scribe. Virtual dynasties of professional scribes, such as the 'Abd al-Zāhir and Faḍl Allāh families, served in these posts during the early Mamlūk period. Baybars I, it seems, had relied on a mamlūk officer, the *dawādār* (master of the inkwell) to serve as chief secretary during his reign, but for security reasons eventually appointed a civilian veteran of the chancery to that post. Although the sources are not entirely clear, they tend to indicate that Qalāwūn created the office of *kātib al-sirr* (secretary of the secret) or private secretary to the sultan, also called *ṣāhib diwān al-inshā'* (head of the chancery), perhaps as a means to maintain his domination over the mamlūk elite, for this official was not only in charge of state correspondence, but also of the royal post (*barīd*) and, thus, intelligence.

Theoretically, the sultan had no authority over the religious establishment, including the judiciary. In fact, however, not only the sultan but also the amīrs wielded a great deal of control over religious affairs through appointments to the judiciary and the foundation of *madrasas* (educational institutions which provided higher-level instruction in the Islamic religious

⁸⁵ Irwin, *Middle East*, 112-14.

sciences (jurisprudence, *ḥadīth*) and sometimes in other subjects as well (such as rhetoric, literature, poetry, and medicine)), *khanqāhs* (institutions which provided facilities for moderate Ṣūfis), and other religious establishments which they funded through the *waqf* system. One source claims that Qalāwūn had actually appointed one of his *khushdāshiyya* over the men of religion, but this report has not been substantiated elsewhere.⁸⁶ Further aspects of the religio-judicial administration will be considered in the following section. Alongside the religio-judicial administration, however, the existence of a system of secular, administrative justice (the *mazālim* court), originating in the ‘Abbāsīd period or earlier, which functioned parallel to the Shari‘a courts, should be noted. Held in a Shāfi‘ī *madrasa* in Cairo, the *mazālim* sessions were moved by Baybars I, imitating Nūr al-Dīn’s practice, to the *dār al-‘adl* (palace of justice) just below the citadel, and during Qalāwūn’s reign to the ceremonial hall within the Citadel walls (*īwān kabīr*). Originally a means by which injustices or requests might be brought directly to the attention of the ruler, the *mazālim* functions had by early Mamlūk times become highly bureaucratized and were, in the process, absorbed as one of the ceremonial formalities surrounding the sultan’s audiences (*khidma*). Among the wide range of matters dealt with in *mazālim* sessions were petitions “for offices or *iqṭā’s*, the suppression of particular ‘*ulamā*’ and their teachings, and the implementation of law and order, as well as appeals for justice and the application of *kāḍīs*” decisions.”⁸⁷ Though *qāḍīs* were normally present at these sessions, and indeed, might even be consulted, *mazālim* cases were nevertheless dealt with by mamlūk officials.

Religious currents

Early Mamlūk Egypt harboured a wide spectrum of Islamic religious expression, a range which included the remnants of Ismā‘īlī Shī‘ism, but now increasingly Sunnism and Ṣūfism in all their variety. Less than a century preceding the Mamlūk ascent to power, Egypt under the aegis of the Fāṭimid caliphate had been, if perhaps only nominally, an Ismā‘īlī Shī‘ī state. While it may be that the Ismā‘īlism of the Fāṭimids had never put down deep roots among the Egyptian populace as a whole, pockets of Shī‘ism remained, especially, perhaps, in areas of Upper Egypt, at least until the early fourteenth century. That Abu’l-Ḥasan al-Bakrī’s fantastical biography of the Prophet, dating to a much earlier period, continued to find an audience in Mamlūk Cairo may be further evidence for the persistence of Shī‘ī belief

⁸⁶ Northrup, *Slave to Sultan*, 199.

⁸⁷ J. S. Nielsen, “*Mazālim*,” in *El2*, VI, 932–35; and idem, *Secular Justice in an Islamic State: Mazālim under the Bahri Mamlūks* (Istanbul, 1985), 935.

even in the north, for it incorporated ideas which appealed mainly to Shi'is.⁸⁸ Social unrest, expressed in religious terms, sometimes with Shi'i colouring, was also not unknown. Rioters in Cairo protested in the name of 'Alī in 1260; and in 1297 a revolt was raised against the Mamlūk regime by a Fātimid pretender in Upper Egypt.⁸⁹ Force was occasionally used to eliminate Shi'i strongholds: the Ismā'īlī Assassins, still ensconced in their fortresses in northern Syria, were finally extirpated in 1271, and early in the fourteenth century al-Nāṣir Muḥammad sent an expedition against Shi'i heretics in Mount Lebanon.⁹⁰ Also, Christians still constituted an important minority of the Egyptian population, a minority which had gained renewed strength and vigour as a result of the mostly benign attitude of the Fātimid regime. Perhaps as much to counter the revivification of Christianity and the prominence of Christians in Egypt as to erase the traces of Fātimid Isma'ilism, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, upon abolishing the Fātimid caliphate, embarked upon a religious policy aimed at strengthening Sunnī Islam against these competitors.⁹¹ The religious policies of the Ayyūbids, pursued even more energetically by the Bahṛī mamlūks, would result in a "consciousness-raising," which ultimately created in the Bahṛī period an even more intensely Islamic and Sunnī religious environment.

Sunnī Islam itself included a wide spectrum of religious belief and practice including Sūfism, which in its more moderate form had been incorporated within the Sunnī sphere. The relatively well-documented lives and careers of two individuals, the Shādhilī Sūfī shaykh Tāj al-Dīn ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh (d. 1309) and the Ḥanbalī jurisprudent and scholar Taqī al-Dīn ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), give some idea of the range of Sunnī religious expression in Egypt at the time. By the thirteenth century Sūfism had become widespread among the Egyptian population. The Shādhiliyya, a Sūfī order (*ṭāriqa*), or perhaps more precisely, "school," which had coalesced around the teachings of Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 1258), quickly found wide appeal in Morocco, where al-Shādhilī had originated, in north Africa, and in Egypt, where he finally settled, and even further afield. Although it was not the only Sūfī

⁸⁸ Boaz Shoshan, *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo* (Cambridge, 1993), 23–39, esp. 38–39.

⁸⁹ Jean-Claude Garçin, *Un centre musulman de la Haute Égypte médiévale: Qūs* (Cairo, 1976), 309, 311. Baybars suppressed a revolt of black slaves in Cairo led by a Shi'i ascetic and for all practical purposes brought about the downfall of the Syrian Isma'ilis during his reign (Garçin, *Qūs*, 101); al-Nāṣir sent an expedition against the Druze and their Shi'i and Maronite allies in the Lebanese mountains (Holt, "Some Observations," 504).

⁹⁰ Enumerated by U. Haarmann, "Miṣr, 5. The Mamlūk Period 1250–1517," *El2*, VII, 169.

⁹¹ Gary Leiser, "The Madrasa and the Islamization of the Middle East: The Case of Egypt," *JARCE*, 22 (1985), 29–47; see also Leonor Fernandes, "Mamlūk Politics and Education: The Evidence of Two Fourteenth Century Waqfiyya," *Annales Islamologiques*, 23 (1987), 87–88.

order in early Mamlūk Egypt (the Rifā'iyya, Badawiyya and others also found adherents), the popularity of the Shādhiliyya is probably to be attributed to its flexibility and lack of real institutional structure, a characteristic which allowed it to adapt to changing conditions and embrace a variety of more local popular practices and beliefs. Combining aspects of Sunnī piety, based on the Qur'an and *ḥadīth*, and Ṣūfī mysticism, al-Shādhili's teachings provided a middle way.

Representative of Shādhili Ṣūfism in Egypt in the early Mamlūk period is Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh (d. 1309). Māliki by birth, Shāfi'i by later affiliation, and an opponent of Ṣūfism in his early years, Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh was, nevertheless, destined to become the third great shaykh or "master" of the Shādhiliyya. Though more extreme forms of Ṣūfism existed, Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh's career and preaching exemplify the moderate Ṣūfism of the time which melded Sunnī orthodoxy with Ṣūfī spirituality, for Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh was both orthodox scholar and Ṣūfī shaykh. His sermons, addressed to ordinary people, while propagating rather conventional Sunnī themes, also introduced listeners to Ṣūfī ideas which now incorporated elements of popular religion such as saints, miracles, the invocation of God (*dhikr*), and visits (*ziyāra*) to the tombs of saints and the pious.⁹²

It was exactly these sorts of ideas and practices that the Ḥanbalī scholar Taqī al-Dīn ibn Taymiyya found most abhorrent. Born in Ḥarrān and raised in Damascus, Ibn Taymiyya, although perhaps not the most typical representative of Sunnī orthodoxy, is without doubt the most prominent religious scholar of the period. His thought illustrates an important strand of Sunnism at the time, still influential today, while his career helps to delineate aspects of the religious outlook of the Mamlūk regime. An adherent of the Ḥanbalī legal rite, yet versed in the doctrines of the other *madhhabs* (schools of legal thought and practice), as well as in heresiographical literature, philosophy, and Ṣūfism, Ibn Taymiyya's irascible personality, his insistence on an extreme, morally rigorist Sunnism based on a literal interpretation of the Qur'an and Sunna, and his hostility to popular religion brought him into frequent conflict with the regime and with individuals who, for religious or political reasons, did not support his views.⁹³ In fact, he was imprisoned no fewer than six times, on five occasions with regard to his religious beliefs, which were considered by the regime to pose a threat.⁹⁴ Though not opposed to Ṣūfism per se, he denounced all Ṣūfī innovations.

So vehement was Ibn Taymiyya in his attacks on the Shādhiliyya that a clash was inevitable. In 1307 or 1308 Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh joined the shaykh of the Sa'id al-Su'adā' *khānqāh* and more than 500 commoners in a march to

⁹² Shoshan, *Popular Culture*, 14–16, and works cited therein.

⁹³ Shoshan, *Popular Culture*, 67.

⁹⁴ Donald P. Little, "The Historical and Historiographical Significance of the Detention of Ibn Taymiyya," *IJMES*, 4 (1973), 311–13.

the Cairo citadel to protest against Ibn Taymiyya's polemics against *ittihādiyya* Sūfis – those who believed in some form of mystical union with God, among whom may be counted Islam's greatest mystic Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn (al-) 'Arabī (d. 1240) and its greatest Arab mystical poet Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 1235), who by the end of the thirteenth century had been accorded sainthood.⁹⁵ As Shoshan notes, the incident reveals the widespread influence of Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh's ideas.⁹⁶ Ibn al-Fāriḍ's rapid elevation to sainthood likewise indicates the strength of aspects of popular religion such as the cult of saints which, incidentally, found adherents not just among the poor and illiterate, but among all segments of the population.⁹⁷ In any case Ibn Taymiyya, taking his Sunnism to an extreme, incurred the wrath of several of his more moderate colleagues and the suspicion of the intrepid traveller and observer, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, that he was "unbalanced" (*illā anna fi 'aqlihi shay'an*).⁹⁸

The Bahrī Mamlūks embraced Sunnism and Sūfism in all its variety out of both personal piety and political expediency. Although Baybars I endowed several Sunnī institutions, his attachment to the dervish shaykh Khāḍir is well known.⁹⁹ Qalāwūn, for whom there is, incidentally, evidence of lingering shamanistic belief, endowed a *madrasa* in his hospital complex; yet it was from Sūfis that he sought comfort at the time of his son's fatal illness. Lājīn and Kitbughā were both pious and the latter was affiliated with at least two Sūfī orders.¹⁰⁰ Baybars al-Jāshnikīr sought the counsel of a Sūfī shaykh and during his short reign endowed several Sūfī institutions. Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad likewise sponsored a *madrasa*, but it is perhaps his *khānqāh* at Siryāqūs in which he was personally more interested and which attracted most public attention. Al-Nāṣir Ḥasan (1347–51) not only favoured religious scholars at court but built just below the citadel perhaps the most renowned *madrasa* of the Bahrī period.

Ascending the throne the Bahrī mamlūks, continuing Ayyūbid precedents, professed loyalty to the 'Abbāsīd caliph, continued to favour the Shāfi'ī legal school over the other three *madhhabs* (the Mālikī, Hanafī and Hanbalī legal rites), and founded Sunnī and Sūfī religious institutions. However, the course they followed was dictated not just by precedent but also by new

⁹⁵ T. Emil Homerin, "Umar ibn al-Fāriḍ, a Saint of Mamlūk and Ottoman Egypt," in Grace Martin Smith (ed.), and Carl W. Ernst (assoc. ed.), *Manifestations of Sainthood in Islam* (Istanbul, 1993), 86.

⁹⁶ Shoshan, *Popular Culture*, 16.

⁹⁷ Homerin, "Umar ibn al-Fāriḍ," 88–89.

⁹⁸ Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Rihla*, as cited by Donald P. Little, "Did Ibn Taymiyya Have a Screw Loose?" *Studia Islamica*, 41 (1975), 95, with discussion of the phrase and its translation.

⁹⁹ P. M. Holt, "An Early Source on Shaykh Khāḍir al-Mihrānī," *BSOAS*, 46 (1983), 33–39.

¹⁰⁰ Irwin, *Middle East*, 95.

circumstances: the strength of the religious currents they found on taking power, the impact of the crusades and the Mongol invasions and of the fall of the caliphate, and their slave origin and consequent need for legitimacy and supremacy. First, the crusades and Mongol invasions had left Egypt as the final redoubt of Islam. To counter the enemy the Bahrī Mamlūks were compelled to build on the foundations of moral unity which had been laid at least since the days of Nūr al-Dīn, hero of the “counter crusade” (d. 1174). Unity was an essential basis for the enterprise, and so the Bahrī sultans were compelled to uphold majority views in order to elicit cooperation from the civilian elite and to avoid the disaffection of the masses whose labor ultimately paid for Mamlūk military ventures.

Second, having been introduced to Islamic society under the tutelage of the Ayyūbids, it was only natural that the early Mamlūk sultans should follow the only model they knew, the Sunnism traditionally favoured by the Turks and also by their master al-Šāliḥ Ayyūb as well as heroes of the recent past such as Šalāḥ al-Dīn. Although personal piety should not be discounted as a factor in Mamlūk support for Sunnī Islam, the “deficient” status of mamlūks in Islamic society¹⁰¹ as individuals of pagan birth and slave origin, who craved acceptance at the political, and probably at the personal, level must certainly have been a consideration, for faith was an integrating and unifying factor; it was the one thing the Mamlūk elite shared with their subjects. Legitimation, even if only symbolic, was thus a priority. This was sought among other means, as we have seen, through the transfer of the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate to Cairo and caliphal recognition. As seat of both the sultanate and the caliphate, Cairo succeeded Baghdad as the religio-political centre of Sunnī Islam.¹⁰²

The Mamlūks also came to wield considerable influence among the scholars and judiciary. From the reign of Šalāḥ al-Dīn the Šāfi‘ī *madhhab* had enjoyed pre-eminence, symbolized by the selection of the *qāḍī al-quḍāt* (chief judge) from its ranks. Baybars began appointing a chief *qāḍī* for each of the four rites. While the Šāfi‘īs still retained certain privileges, each school now gained increased stature. Baybars’s motives can only be surmised. He thought perhaps to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population who came from regions where other schools were preeminent, or it may be that he wished to promote the more liberal Ḥanafī *madhhab* favored by the Mamlūks. In any case the appointment of an individual from each school to a prestigious judicial post allowed the sultan to exercise patronage in each group and thus more influence over all four legal rites.

Either to demonstrate personal piety, or to gain legitimacy or influence

¹⁰¹ Haarmann, “Miṣr,” 165.

¹⁰² Shaun Marmon, *Eunuchs and Sacred Boundaries in Islamic Society* (New York, Oxford, 1995), 50–51, for associated titulary and a particularly interesting interpretation of this process viewed through the eunuch institution.

among the scholarly class, the Mamlûks surpassed their predecessors in the number of both Sunnî and Şûfî religious institutions they established during their rule. Pious civilians also endowed such institutions, but because of the far greater resources at their disposal, those established by the mamlûk élite dominated in terms of both number and prestige. This activity reached a peak during the fourteenth century, transforming the physical environment of the major urban centers and consequently the religious climate of the entire region as well. The widespread establishment of *madrasas* assured the creation of an educated Sunnî religious élite with shared values, one which could articulate a response to any challenge to official religion and which also, incidentally, tended to cooperate with the regime. It was also from among the *madrasa* graduates that appointments to the judiciary, to secretarial posts, and to the religious establishment were usually made. But the Mamlûk elite, both through piety and the need to win the support and cooperation of the masses among whom Şûfism was gaining increasing strength, also endowed Şûfî institutions. The *khānqāh*, as opposed to the *ribāt* or *zāwiya*, was the institution chosen to promote moderate Şûfism, i.e. Şûfism which conformed to the Shari'a.¹⁰³ Through the pious endowments which funded these institutions and the patronage of the religious scholars appointed to them, the Mamlûk elite exercised enormous influence on religious life. Although the properties donated as endowments (*awqāf*: sing., *waqf*) to fund these institutions were theoretically alienated from private ownership, the donor frequently reserved the right to supervise the foundation during his lifetime. He was thus able to control appointments to educational, legal and spiritual posts and in this way to influence the religious environment of the realm.

Although the Mamlûks appear on the surface to have fostered variety within Sunnism, the parameters of what was acceptable within each particular mode of expression became increasingly circumscribed as the period progressed, at least in part as a result of Mamlûk involvement with the religious institution. This trend, which had begun even prior to the rise of the Mamlûks, was accelerated in the early Mamlûk period when new circumstances, and, perhaps, the increasingly diverse and multi-ethnic population, compelled the Bahrî regime to seek unity. The more conservative environment, one most receptive to orthodox Islam in its several forms, furthered the process of re-Sunnification, even Islamization in Egypt. Partly through the regime's utilization of these various currents and partly as a result of natural inclinations, it would seem, a certain cross-fertilization or homogenization of Sunnism and Şûfism occurred in early Mamlûk Egypt

¹⁰³ Leonor Fernandes, *The Evolution of a Sufi Institution in Mamlûk Egypt: The Khanqah* (Berlin, 1988), 2.

and Syria. Orthodox scholars were appointed to Šūfi institutions¹⁰⁴ and by the end of the fourteenth century the teaching of Šūfism in *madrasas* had become acceptable.¹⁰⁵ The Shādhili shaykh Ibn ‘Atā’ Allāh, for example, ended his life as a professor in the Maṣūriyya *madrasa*.

At the same time extremism was less tolerated. Ibn Taymiyya’s trial and detentions are one indication of the more restrictive environment, as is the fact that in 1306 the dervish shaykh Barāq received at best “a mixed reception” in Damascus and Cairo,¹⁰⁶ whereas, despite some raised eyebrows, al-Zāhir Baybars had early in his reign indulged the unsavory dervish shaykh Khādir with his patronage and confidence.¹⁰⁷ This growing religious intolerance, characterized by one scholar as an “inquisition,” eventually also came to affect the non-Muslim minorities of the Bahri sultanate.

Communal interaction

Although by the eleventh century the *dhimmī* population in Egypt had been reduced to a minority, albeit still a significant one, it was probably not until the fourteenth century that this minority was definitively weakened through more massive conversions, forced or otherwise. Only then did Coptic cease to be spoken, relegated to liturgical use. To explain this trend, scholars have adduced several theories: the impact of the crusades and the Mongol invasions on Muslim perceptions of these religious minorities; the employment of Christians in administrative-financial positions which gave them power over the Muslims in contravention of Muslim legal and popular opinion; the social stress created by “an unsympathetic, largely alien, government,” which was expressed in protests against Christians;¹⁰⁸ and the flowering of the Sunnī revival in Egypt and Syria since Ayyubid times which had led to a more intensely religious atmosphere. More recently there has been some thought that growing rivalry over trade in the eastern Mediterranean may also have contributed to the hardening of attitudes toward Christians, particularly in Egypt in the Bahri period.¹⁰⁹

During the second half of the thirteenth century, at the peak of the campaigns to oust the crusaders from the Syrian littoral and of the struggle against the Mongols and their Christian allies, the Bahri sultans, Baybars, Qalāwūn and Khalīl, displayed a certain ambivalence toward their indi-

¹⁰⁴ Shoshan, *Popular Culture*, 14; Fernandes, “Evolution,” 101.

¹⁰⁵ Garçin, *Qūs*, 314; Fernandes, *Evolution*, 2. Also Donald P. Little, “Religion under the Mamlūks,” *The Muslim World*, 73 (1983), 177; Shoshan, *Popular Culture*, 11.

¹⁰⁶ Little, “Religion,” 175–77.

¹⁰⁷ Holt, “An Early Source on Shaykh Khādir,” 33–39.

¹⁰⁸ Donald Richards, “The Coptic Bureaucracy under the Mamlūks,” in *Colloque international sur l’histoire du Caire*, 27 mars–5 avril 1969 (Cairo, n.d.), 377–78.

¹⁰⁹ Irwin, *Middle East*, 118.

genous Christian and Jewish (but especially Christian) subjects. Though they continued to depend on Christian bureaucrats, especially in the financial bureaus, they also sometimes bowed to Muslim pressure to impose traditional restrictions on their employment as well as other symbols of subservience. The target of these actions was not the indigenous Christian minority as a whole, but usually the employees of the financial and army bureaus.¹¹⁰ Paradoxically, in the fourteenth century, long after the fall of Acre and the Mongol invasions had subsided, the attitude of the regime toward the indigenous Christian community hardened. To this period belong, for example, Ghāzī ibn al-Wāsiṭī's, al-Asnāwī's and Ibn Taymiyya's tracts against their employment.¹¹¹ A Shāfi'i jurist "publicly accused the Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad . . . of favoring Copts to the detriment of Muslims: 'You have appointed Copts and Coptic Muslims to office and have given them authority in your *diwān* and over the money of the Muslims!'"¹¹² The boiling point seems to have been reached in 1321, when anti-Christian riots broke out. The situation for minorities became so difficult that previously steadfast Christians began converting to Islam in larger numbers. The events of 1321 have been interpreted in various ways. The outbreak of violence has been ascribed to Muslim resentment against Christian employment in the financial and army bureaus, and indeed there is evidence to suggest that much of the anti-Christian sentiment was directed at this specific group.¹¹³ On the other hand it is also suggested that the sultan himself stirred up trouble to divert the anger of those who had suffered from his efforts to redistribute *iqṭā'* assignments.¹¹⁴ But also worth mentioning is that several Coptic converts were involved in administering the *rawk*, giving rise to resentment among those who had suffered.¹¹⁵ In 1354 yet another wave of rioting swept the country, possibly provoked by the exposure of Ibn Zunbur, a Christian convert to Islam. In his capacity as wazīr, *nāẓir al-khāṣṣ* and *nāẓir al-jaysh* (head of financial administration, supervisor of the privy purse, supervisor of the army bureau) to the sultan al-Ṣāliḥ Ṣāliḥ, Ibn Zunbur concentrated unprecedented fiscal and administrative powers in his

¹¹⁰ Richard Gottheil, "A Fetwa on the Appointment of Dhimmis to Office," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* (1912), 203–14; Donald P. Little, "Coptic Converts to Islam," in Michael Gervers and Ramzi Jibran Bikhazi (eds.), *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Toronto, 1990), 263–88; Linda S. Northrup, "Muslim-Christian Relations during the Reign of the Mamlūk Sultan al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn, AD 1278–1290," in *Conversion and Continuity*, 253–61; Richards, "Coptic Bureaucracy," 373–81.

¹¹¹ Richard Gottheil, "An Answer to the Dhimmis," *JAOS*, 41 (1921), 393–457; Moshe Perlmann, "Asnawi's Tract against Christian Officials," in Samuel Lowinger (ed.), *Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume* (Jerusalem, 1958), II, 172–208.

¹¹² Little, "Coptic Converts," 265.

¹¹³ Little, "Coptic Converts," 266; also Irwin, *Middle East*, 12–14.

¹¹⁴ Haarmann, "Miṣr," 170.

¹¹⁵ Irwin, *Middle East*, 110–12.

hands.¹¹⁶ Not only Copts, but Christian converts to Islam were dismissed and sumptuary laws were reimposed. The crusade of the Cypriot ruler Peter I of Lusignan, which attacked Alexandria in 1365, causing damage from which that city never really recovered, could not have led to an improvement in intercommunal relations.

Diplomatic and commercial relations

During the reigns of sultans Baybars (1260–77) and Qalāwūn (1279–90), Egypt became the dominant power in the Middle East, but Egypt's hegemony did not go unchallenged. While the Bahriyya were emerging as a political and military factor in Egyptian politics during the crisis of 1249 in Egypt, the Mongols were already hovering on the horizon. Transoxiana and eastern Iran, including the territory of the Khwarazm-Shah, east of the Caspian Sea, southern Russia including the Kipchak steppes (the recruiting ground for al-Šāliḥ Ayyūb's mamlūks), Georgia, Seljuk Rūm (Anatolia), as well as Cilician (Lesser) Armenia with its capital at Sis, and its ally the crusader principality of Antioch, had all fallen under the Mongol yoke.¹¹⁷ The Mongols were poised to advance into Iraq, Syria and even Egypt itself. Though the Mamlūks would recover Syria and save Egypt from Mongol overlordship, the Mongol menace would continue to dominate most aspects of Mamlūk foreign and commercial policy into the early years of the fourteenth century.

No sooner had the Mamlūks seized power than Hülegü, grandson of Chingiz Khān, began his advance into Iran. Baghdād was taken in 1258 and the 'Abbāsid caliph was executed. Mongol forces crossed the Euphrates in 1259. Syria was next. Hülegü, whose armies now also included Georgians, Armenians, and Rūm Seljuks, took Aleppo in January 1260. Ḥamāh and Ḥomṣ offered submission, leaving the way to Damascus open. At this point Hülegü himself withdrew, but left his general Kitbughā with a small army in Syria. Despite his earlier indications of submission to the khān, the Ayyūbid prince of Damascus, al-Nāṣir Yūsuf, now had second thoughts. Caught between the Mongols and his enemy the sultan Quṭuz in Cairo, al-Nāṣir fled into the desert north of Karak, where he was captured by Mongols and later probably executed. Damascus was occupied in February 1260 and Mongol forces raided as far as Gaza and Hebron. Cairo now seemed within Mongol reach. Baybars, leader of the exiled Bahriyya, and his rival Quṭuz, sultan of Egypt, though bitter adversaries, found this prospect sufficiently frightening that they effected a reconciliation in order to present a united front to the enemy. Baybars at the head of the vanguard led the Mamlūk forces up the

¹¹⁶ Little, "Coptic Converts," 269; Irwin, *Middle East*, 41.

¹¹⁷ Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamlūks*, 17–25.

Syrian littoral, their passage facilitated by the authorities of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. The victory of the combined Mamlūk forces over the Mongol armies at ‘Ayn Jālūt in September 1260 had a tremendous psychological impact; it demonstrated that the Mongols were not invincible. It was also, as we have seen, a rather convincing reason to recognize the legitimacy of Mamlūk rule. One immediate consequence of the Mamlūk victory was that Syria, in the absence of any political authority, was absorbed by the Bahrī sultanate of Egypt. As a buffer zone and granary and also as a region with some commercial significance, Syria was an important acquisition. Yet its situation was precarious. Bohemond VI of Antioch-Tripoli, allied through marriage with the Armenian ruling family, had cast his lot with the Mongols. Al-Nāṣir Yūsuf in Damascus vacillated. Al-Mughith ‘Umar at Karak was later accused by Baybars of also treating with the Mongols.

The early Bahrī sultans Quṭuz, Baybars and Qalāwūn, on the other hand, all successively assumed a defiantly anti-Mongol stance. To do so was their very *raison d’être* and won them the grudging acceptance, and sometimes even gratitude, of their subjects. Despite continual skirmishing, the Mongols would fail to launch a serious attack on Mamlūk territory during the remainder of Baybars’s reign (1260–77). Since Baybars could not have known this he began efforts to strengthen his army, consolidate his rule, and secure the frontiers in Syria. Lulls in the border war with the Mongols were used to gain a firm grip over internal affairs in Syria: rivals – mamlūk or Ayyūbid – were eliminated. The revolt of Baybars’s *khushdāsh* Sanjar al-Ḥalabī in Damascus was quashed; the renegade mamlūk al-Barlī’s hold on the strategic fortress of al-Bira on the Euphrates was broken; the Ismā‘ilī fortresses in the north were taken. The Ayyūbid prince al-Mughith ‘Umar, Baybars’s former “employer,” and still the lord of the strategically located fortress of Karak at the southern end of the Dead Sea, was treacherously murdered. Relations with the Bedouin Arab tribes of the region were also cultivated.

Like Baybars, Qalāwūn also had to surmount internal challenges to his authority in order to gain a free hand against the Mongols. Initially appointing members of his *khushdāshiyya*, who had helped bring him to power, to important posts in that province, he replaced them as soon as possible with his own, theoretically more loyal, mamlūks. The danger of appointing one’s *khushdāshiyya*, among whom one was only first among equals, to posts such as the governorship of Damascus, for example, had been amply demonstrated during Baybars’s reign by the revolt of Sanjar al-Ḥalabī. Now, shortly after Qalāwūn had usurped the sultanate, his viceroy in Damascus, his *khushdāsh* Sunqur al-Ashqar, also declared his independence. Taking advantage of the discord between Qalāwūn and Sunqur al-Ashqar, and probably at the latter’s urging, the Mongol armies, led by Möngke Temür and assisted as before by Armenians, Georgians and

Rūm, sacked Aleppo. Sunqur al-Ashqar, however, was persuaded by the sultan's allies to stand with the Mamlūks rather than take his chances with the Mongols. Thus, the further progress of the Mongol armies was definitively arrested at the Battle of Ḥomṣ in 1281, when the Mamlūks and their auxillaries, united under Qalāwūn's personal leadership, were victorious over the invaders. Following the victory, however, Sunqur al-Ashqar was allowed to re-ensconce himself in the fortress of Ṣahyūn (Saone) which dominated strategic routes from the coast to the interior and which Qalāwūn had given to him as an *iqṭā'* after putting down his revolt. Thus Sunqur al-Ashqar remained a weak link in the Syrian defenses. Simultaneously, Baybars's sons, exiled to the fortress of Karak in the south, instigated unrest in that region and maintained contact with Sunqur al-Ashqar in the north, further undermining Qalāwūn's hold. It was only during the second half of his reign that both these rebels were subdued. Karak and Ṣahyūn were taken in 1286 and 1287 respectively.

In addition to the internal enemies of the sultan Syria also harbored external foes: Frankish crusader and other western European interests with a presence in the Syrian coastal lands including the military orders (Templars, Hospitallers and Teutonic Knights, the strongest force in rural areas) and the Italian commercial cities, especially Genoa and Venice, whose strength lay in urban centers. Fortunately for the Mamlūks the crusader kingdoms had been weakened by the discord among these various factions which the Mamlūks, of course, sought to exploit. These parties were also at a disadvantage in that they lacked a ready and available supply of manpower. Though in comparison to the Mongols, the crusaders thus presented a minor threat in the short term, their occupation of Syrian soil could not be tolerated for strategic reasons in the long run, for not only might their ports and fortresses serve as bases for future crusading ventures, but experience had confirmed that they should be regarded as potential allies both of internal rivals and of the Mongols themselves. The thirteenth century had been punctuated by numerous efforts on the part of both the western powers and the Īlkhānids to coordinate their military campaigns against the Mamlūks and even to effect an alliance.

Nevertheless, both Baybars and Qalāwūn sought to secure their positions by signing accords with the crusader states. Providing no guarantee of security, the truces did help to buy time and a freer hand and were used to exploit Frankish factionalism. The Frankish parties, in any case, were in the weaker position, so that these agreements, skillfully used in concert with military action, eventually led to the demise of the crusader and Frankish presence in the Syrian littoral. Renewing an existing agreement, Baybars concluded a truce with the Hospitallers of Ḥiṣn al-Akrād (Crac des Chevaliers) in 1267 which was renewed by him in 1271 and by Qalāwūn in 1281. Negotiations which had begun as early as 1261 with Beirut eventually

resulted in a truce concluded in 1269 which was renewed by Qalāwūn in 1285, by which Beirut became, in effect, a vassalage of the sultanate. In 1271, the same year that Baybars deprived Bohemond VI of Antioch and was preparing for the conquest of Tripoli itself, the sultan signed a truce with him regarding Tripoli, perhaps because news had reached the sultan of the arrival of King Edward I of England at the head of a crusading army and of the king's rumored collaboration with the Īlkhānids.¹¹⁸ Qalāwūn renewed the agreement concluded by Baybars with Bohemond VII in 1281. In 1282 Qalāwūn also signed an accord with the Templars and in the following year came to an agreement with the authorities of Acre (now capital of the Latin Kingdom), Sidon and 'Athlith (Chateau Pélerin). While imposing bans on the construction of new fortifications and requiring notice of any impending Crusades, these agreements created a semblance of normal relations between the two parties with regard to frontier regions, fugitives, and commerce, and even, surprisingly, the joint administration of some areas where revenues and some responsibilities were shared. Despite the underlying hostilities, it was convenient and eventually advantageous to the sultanate to permit these condominiums (*munāṣafāt*), for it allowed the Mamlūks to "whittle away Frankish authority in the border districts."¹¹⁹

Mamlūk diplomatic efforts were, however, only a temporary solution. Baybars, Qalāwūn and al-Ashraf Khalīl pursued their objectives militarily as well. Thus soon after his victory at 'Ayn Jālūt, Baybars launched a systematic series of campaigns aimed at reducing crusader strongholds along the Syrian littoral. By the end of his reign Baybars counted among his most important conquests the coastal towns of Caesarea, Haifa and Arsūf (1265), the strategically positioned, interior fortress of Safad (1266), and the Latin Kingdom possessions of Jaffa and Shaqīf Arnūn (Beaufort) (1268), all of which were crowned by the reconquest of Antioch, wrested from Bohemond VI in 1271. Bohemond was left only with Tripoli, whose vicinity Baybars also raided in the last years of his reign.

Obligated to devote the first years of his sultanate to deterring the Mongol threat and eliminating internal opposition, Qalāwūn undertook no major campaigns against the crusader kingdoms. Once he had achieved some stability on these fronts, however, he embarked on a much more aggressive policy toward the Frankish enclaves and nearly completed the task begun by Baybars. The Hospitaller fortress of Marqab (Margat) was recovered in 1285 and thereafter replaced Ḥiṣn al-Akrād as the Mamlūk base for further campaigns in the north, including Tripoli, which fell in 1289. By 1290, however, he felt strong enough to attack the final crusader enclave, Acre, capital of the Latin Kingdom. While encamped outside Cairo in preparation

¹¹⁸ Holt, *Age of the Crusades*, 96.

¹¹⁹ Holt, *Age of the Crusades*, 156–57.

for departure, however, Qalāwūn died. His son Khalil inherited the task of reducing this last Frankish outpost on Syrian territory. Acre fell in 1291, ending, for all practical purposes, the crusader presence in Syria. Thus by 1291 not only had the Mamlūks stopped the Mongol advance, but they had also rid the region, with the exception of Cyprus, of the two-century-long Frankish presence.

Though the Battle of Homs in 1281 would be the last major Mongol-Mamlūk encounter until the end of the century, Qalāwūn, like Baybars, remained on his guard throughout the rest of his reign, never certain that the enemy would not return. In the meantime the sultan received two embassies in Cairo from the Īlkhān, now Tegüder (1282–4), who having converted to Islam had taken the name Aḥmad. In the course of the first a letter was delivered to the sultan which, “far from being a call for friendship or alliance . . . [was] rather an ultimatum to Qalāwūn, urging him to show submission and obedience or risk war . . . in other words . . . to become an obedient vassal of the Ilkhans.”¹²⁰ Now that he had converted to Islam, Tegüder suggested that there was no longer any reason for the sultan not to submit. Qalāwūn’s answer was defiant: “You send us word that if strife is not to cease between us, that we had better choose a battlefield, and that God will give victory to whom He will. Here is our answer: Those of your troops who survived their last defeat are not anxious to revisit the former battlefield. They fear to go there again to renew their misfortunes . . .”¹²¹ By the second embassy, Tegüder had dropped his demand. Although it was perhaps not apparent at the time, the Mongol advance had, in fact, come to a halt, for the possibility of world dominion was dwindling as their empire began to dissolve. Nevertheless, raiding activity, usually initiated by the Mongols, continued into the early fourteenth century. Only once were the Mongols victorious, in 1299 at the Battle of Wādī al-Khazindār near Homs, but by 1300 the Mongols had departed. The last Mongol incursion into Mamlūk territory in 1312–13 ended in a rout. Though hostilities were formally ended by a peace agreement, signed in 1322, the situation remained tense until 1328 when the agreement was confirmed. In the meantime the Mamlūks maintained a state of military preparedness.

The Mongols, however, posed far more than a military threat. The Mongol conquests had created a vast new trade zone, making the northerly overland route to the east an attractive alternative to the southerly sea route which linked eastern lands via the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, and the Nile with the Mediterranean. For the next century the Mamlūks struggled to maintain trade over the southern route from which they stood to reap large benefits. Even more critical, however, was the threat posed to the slave

¹²⁰ Adel Allouche, “Teguder’s Ultimatum to Qalāwūn,” *IJMES*, 22 (1990), 438.

¹²¹ Allouche, “Teguder’s Ultimatum,” 442.

trade, vital to the existence of the Mamlūk regime, which was conducted along routes passing through Mongol territory. Increasingly this concern became intertwined with the competition in the region for the east-west trade. Indeed, it is clear that commercial concerns underlay much of Mamlūk diplomatic and even military activity during the Bahri period.

Upon seizing power Baybars lost no time in securing access to the recruiting grounds in, and the trade routes which led to, the Kipchak steppes north and east of the Black Sea, now ruled by Berke, Mongol khān of the Golden Horde. Fortunately for the Mamlūks one important circumstance favoured this policy. A power struggle had broken out upon the death of the Great Khan, Möngkē, in 1259. Berke, who had sided with the losing candidate, now sought an alliance with Baybars against their common enemy the Mongol Īlkhānids of Iran. Good relations were also favoured by the fact that Berke had become a Muslim. Embassies were exchanged and favourable relations were established. Though Berke's successor, Möngkē Tēmūr, was not a Muslim, mutual interests made it incumbent on him to renew the alliance with the sultanate. Qalāwūn dispatched envoys to Möngkē Tēmūr in 1280, who on their return brought news of Möngkē Tēmūr's death and the accession of Tödē Möngkē (1280-87), who like Berke converted to Islam, giving the sultan some hope for continued cordial relations.

Two major north-south trade routes linked the Kipchak recruiting grounds under Berke's control with the sultanate: a sea route which passed from the north through Byzantine territory – the Black Sea and the narrow straits to the Mediterranean; and a land route which crossed Anatolia through territory controlled by the Mongol protectorates of the Seljuk sultanate of Rūm and Cilician Armenia. While relations with the Golden Horde remained more or less cordial, relations with Byzantium and the Mongol protectorates of Cilician Armenia and Seljuk Rūm were more complicated. Byzantium, fearing a Mongol advance, was obliged to maintain friendly relations with both the Golden Horde and the Īlkhānids, and because of its shaky position with respect to the Īlkhānids was inclined to seek Mamlūk favour by allowing access to the trade routes. Thus not long after recapturing Constantinople in 1261 from the Latins, Michael VIII Palaeologus (1259-82), emperor of Nicaea, initiated diplomatic contacts with the sultanate. Baybars responded by sending two embassies which returned together in 1262. Incidentally, Baybars's embassy to the Golden Horde, which returned in 1264, had travelled via Constantinople. Because of Michael's need to placate the Īlkhānids, Mamlūk envoys were sometimes detained, especially when Īlkhānid envoys were present or expected in the capital. Qalāwūn, faced with Sunqur al-Ashqar's revolt and Īlkhānid aggression, as well as the growing power of Charles d'Anjou in the eastern Mediterranean early in his reign, was eager to maintain good relations with

Byzantium. Michael, who also viewed Charles d'Anjou as an enemy, saw Qalāwūn as a potential ally. Thus, the result of Qalāwūn's embassy to Michael of 1280 was an agreement reached in 1281, which in addition to clauses of political import contained others intended to secure the slave trade. According to the emperor's text, Michael would abstain from hostilities and guarantee the security of merchants and the free passage of the sultan's ambassadors as well as that of newly recruited mamlūks and slave girls. For his part Qalāwūn also agreed to abstain from hostilities, but did not accede to the emperor's condition that Christian slaves be excluded from the trade.¹²²

Relations with Cilician Armenia and Seljuk Rūm, which straddled the overland route linking Mamlūk lands to the Golden Horde-controlled Kipchak steppes, necessitated both diplomatic activity and military action. Armenia had been the most faithful of allies to the Īlkhānids in their campaigns against the Mamlūks. Weakened by the Mamlūk victories at 'Ayn Jālūt and Homs, Cilician Armenia, occupying the southeastern corner of Anatolia, the site of several strategic frontier fortresses, was vulnerable. Seljuk Rūm to the north was also at risk, because of its internal disunity. Having previously led several expeditions against northern Syria, the Armenian King Heth'um sought to conclude a truce with Baybars following the Mamlūk conquest of Şafad in 1266. As part of the agreement, however, Baybars sought the surrender of several frontier fortresses, a demand with which the king could not comply out of fear of Mongol reprisal. Baybars was anxious to control these strongholds to secure the frontier and to control the route to central Anatolia.¹²³ Al-Manşūr of Ḥamāh, Baybars's Ayyūbid vassal in Syria, led an expedition against Cilician Armenia in 1266 which left its capital Sis in ruins and the king's son, the future Leo III, temporarily a prisoner. Just two years later Armenia's ally, Antioch, under Bohemond, succumbed to a Mamlūk siege. Subsequently, Mamlūk expeditions against Armenia became increasingly frequent, perhaps because the latter had been harassing Muslim caravans and travellers. Sis was again punished in 1275. A joint Mamlūk–Turkoman expedition, not reported in the Mamlūk sources, attacked from the northeast in 1276.¹²⁴ In 1279 Baybars's son and heir sent an expedition to Armenia under the command of Baysarī and the future sultan Qalāwūn. As sultan, Qalāwūn during the first years of his reign put increasing pressure on the kingdom, partly in retribution for its assistance to the Īlkhānids, but also in an effort to secure the trade routes. He took possession of a number of fortresses and received the tribute formerly paid by the Ismā'ilis to the Armenians. Armenian

¹²² Holt, *Age of the Crusades*, 162.

¹²³ Marius Canard, "Le Royaume d'Arménie-Cilicie et les mamelouks jusqu'au traité de 1285," *Revue des Etudes Arméniennes*, 4 (1967), 242–43.

¹²⁴ Canard, "Royaume d'Arménie-Cilicie," 241–42.

possessions were attacked in 1283 and 1284, and by 1285 the Armenians were also in a much weaker position externally; their ally Antioch had been taken and Tripoli was under pressure. The Īlkhān Abagha's death in 1282 precluded any help from that quarter. Nor could Armenia expect help from the pope. Perhaps realizing that the Armenians no longer posed a significant military threat, Qalāwūn concluded an agreement with them which achieved many of the objectives of the previous expeditions – not only to punish the Armenians for their Mongol alliance, but also to secure the trade routes. At this moment Qalāwūn also began to pursue a more aggressive policy toward the Frankish strongholds so that the agreement was also perhaps convenient in this respect. The respite for the Armenians was brief, however, for Qalāwūn's son al-Ashraf Khalil, with the crusades behind him, would make Armenia his next objective. In a letter to the Armenian ruler announcing the conquest of Acre, al-Ashraf Khalil ominously intimated his intentions and in 1292 Qal'at al-Rūm, the see of the Armenian patriarch, was besieged and taken. Only al-Ashraf Khalil's assassination in 1293 saved Armenia from further devastation. Cilician Armenia would, nevertheless, eventually suffer the same fate as the crusader states; in 1375 it became a vassalage of the sultanate.

Baybars, exploiting factional feuding in Seljuk Rūm, was from at least 1272 in diplomatic contact with the *pervāne*, the real power in that state. Nevertheless, Baybars attacked Seljuk Rūm in 1277. Following his victory over a Mongol army at Elbistan, Baybars was actually installed as sultan, but withdrew, fearing Īlkhānid military intervention. Though the Īlkhānids subsequently established their control in the peninsula more firmly, it was temporary. By Qalāwūn's day Rūm seems to have posed a lesser threat.

Complicating this nexus of relations was the expansion of Genoese power in the Black Sea and the eastern Mediterranean during the last half of the thirteenth century, an expansion which was related to the growing competition in the eastern Mediterranean over east-west trade. Not long after the fall of Baghdād to the Mongols, the Genoese had, through an agreement with Michael VIII Palaeologus, established a colony in Kaffa on the Black Sea. As a result the Genoese gained commercial dominance over one of the most important long-distance routes in the eastern Mediterranean, the north-south route, at the expense of the Venetians (1204–61), who were ousted along with their Latin allies. This route connected Kaffa with the Armenian ports, especially Ayās (where notarial records indicate Genoese involvement in the slave trade),¹²⁵ with Cyprus and with the ports of the Syrian littoral, especially Acre (also involved in the slave trade), and ultimately with Egypt, where the Genoese were represented as well. Genoese attempts to extend their control to the southern portion of this route were

¹²⁵ Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamlūks*, 210.

bitterly contested by other Italian cities, notably Venice, and eventually also by Qalāwūn, who did his best to exploit Genoese-Venetian rivalry.¹²⁶ When, following the death of Bohemond VII in 1287, Tripoli was taken over by the Genoese Embriaco clan (to whom the sultan had previously given assistance) and then nearly incorporated into the Genoese republic, Venice, reacting to this major assertion of strength in the region, may have encouraged the sultan to intervene. No doubt he would have done so anyway. In any case, having concluded a truce with Venice in 1288 which granted Venetian merchants commercial privileges in Syria, Qalāwūn besieged Tripoli, which fell in 1289. Perhaps in retaliation, Benedetto Zaccaria, the Genoese diplomat and admiral, turned corsair and attacked a Muslim ship out of Alexandria. Disclaiming any responsibility for the act, the Genoese authorities sought to reestablish cordial relations with the sultanate. Qalāwūn, dependent on Genoa for the slave trade, had no choice and signed an accord in 1290.

The accession of Arghun (1284–91) to the Īlkhānid throne intensified concern for the trades routes. The thirteenth century had been punctuated by numerous attempts, on the part of both western Christian powers and the Īlkhānids, to coordinate their military campaigns against the Mamlūks if not to form an actual political and military alliance, none of which were realized. Arghun too sent embassies to the pope in 1284, 1287 and in 1289. Significantly, perhaps, the third of these embassies was headed by a Genoese merchant, Buscarello di Ghisolifi, who was also a member of Arghun's guard.¹²⁷ In fact, Arghun may have already come to the conclusion that what the Īlkhānids had not been able to accomplish on the battleground might be achieved on the economic field. He would simply undermine the Mamlūk regime through trade. As early as the 1270s Genoese merchants could be found in the Īlkhānid capital, Tabriz. But by the year 1290 the Genoese, with at least the tacit cooperation of the Īlkhānids, were preparing to extend their reach to the Indian Ocean with the aim of ending the Muslim monopoly over trade with the East. In 1290, 700 western Christians spent the winter in Baghdad building the ships that would be launched in Bašra.¹²⁸ The Genoese-Īlkhānid alliance was acquiring a stranglehold over the Mamlūk trade lifelines, with the potential not only to cut the route to the north but also to harrass merchants in the eastern oceans from which western merchants had previously been excluded. In fact, by the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries several proposals for imposing a trade embargo against the Mamlūks and thereby cutting their lifeline had been put forward. Among the most detailed were those outlined by the

¹²⁶ Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A Short History* (New Haven, London, 1987), 201–03.

¹²⁷ P. Jackson, "Arġūn," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, II (1987), 403.

¹²⁸ Eliyahu Ashtor, *The Levant Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1983), 12.

Venetian Marino Sanudo in his *Secreta Fidelium Crucis*,¹²⁹ and by the Dominican friar Guillaume Adam in his *De modo Sarracenos extirpandi*.¹³⁰ These plans, probably unrealizable in any case, came to nothing when the Īlkhānid ruler Abū Saʿid signed a peace treaty with the sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad in 1322.

As a consequence of the fall of Baghdād to the Mongols in 1258 and the transfer of the caliphate to Cairo, the sultan in Cairo had inherited Baghdād's political and religious role in the region as protector of the two holy cities in Arabia – Mecca and Medina, on the eastern shore of the Red Sea – a responsibility which every sultan took seriously since it served to bolster claims to legitimacy. Thus the sultan sought to demonstrate his interest in the holy cities symbolically through titulary, by sending each year with much pomp and ceremony the *kiswa*, or covering for the Kaʿba, by the construction and repair of monuments, and by making the pilgrimage when possible. The routes also carried pilgrim traffic to the holy sites. Though obliged to secure the safe passage of pilgrims, the sultan also benefited from the important revenues collected from them. The protection of these interests thus involved not only diplomacy but occasionally merited limited military intervention in quarrels between the rulers of the Ḥijāz.

No less important an aspect of the sultanate's interest in the region, however, was Egypt's location at the crossroads of the trade and communications routes with the east, which, extending from China and southeast Asia, hugged the coast of India, branched south along the Arabian coast, turned north through the Red Sea, connecting, via the ports of Aden in southern Arabia, then Dahlak and Suakin on the Nubian shore and Aydhāb in Upper Egypt, with the overland caravan route to Qūṣ on the Nile from where goods were transported by the river to Cairo and beyond. The enormous revenues that accrued to the sultanate from the lucrative trade, especially in spices, ensured that the Red Sea basin and eastern oceans would be a vital sphere of interest to the sultanate. Although it may not have been immediately apparent, this route would suffer from the competing and more attractive northern route now in the hands of the Genoese-Īlkhānid alliance for a century following the Mongol conquest. But there was an additional concern. Not only were the Īlkhānids allowing the Genoese access to the eastern oceans, but they themselves were also involved in the area. Historically Persia had had interests in the Gulf region and along the eastern coast of Arabia. During this period, however, in 1315–16, if not earlier, the Īlkhānids became involved in local rivalries in Mecca and sought to use them, just as the Mamlūks did, to exert influence. Though an effort to conquer the Ḥijāz by the sharif of Mecca with a force furnished by the

¹²⁹ Riley-Smith, *Atlas*, 122–23, for a discussion and map of Sanudo's proposed plan.

¹³⁰ David Morgan, *The Mongols* (Oxford, 1986), 186–87.

Īlkhān Khudābanda (Öljeitü) failed, the sharif did capture Mecca with Mongol assistance two years later, whereupon the name of the Īlkhān Abū Saʿīd (1316–35) was mentioned in the *khutba*.¹³¹ Underlying religious and political interests in the region, therefore, was the imperative to protect the sultanate's commercial interests in the lands of the Red Sea basin (Arabia, the Yemen, Upper Egypt and Nubia, Ethiopia) and the Indian Ocean (e.g., Ceylon, Sind, Hind, China). Mamlūk diplomatic and military activities in these lands must be viewed, therefore, at least partially in the light of these concerns.

Upper Egypt and Nubia were on a route which linked Egypt to sources of gold and slaves. Qūs was both a military garrison and as a port an important link in the eastern trade. Disturbances which threatened the trade routes were firmly dealt with. Baybars and Qalāwūn were occasionally forced to send embassies or even military forces to end tribal harassment of merchants in the eastern deserts of Egypt and in the region of the major ports of Nubia.¹³² These sultans also took advantage of invitations of pretenders to the throne of the Christian Nubian kingdom of al-Maqrura to intervene on their behalf in the frequent disputes over succession, thereby to extend their influence in the region. Diplomacy was often backed up with military force, which, perhaps, rather than territorial acquisition, aimed at ensuring the payment of the *baqt*, the tribute of slaves and gold imposed since early Islamic times,¹³³ at securing the southern frontier region, and at ensuring the safe passage of merchants and pilgrims. Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad succeeded in 1311–12 in having a Muslim candidate installed on the Nubian throne who actually established Islam as the state religion, but his reign was brief. Mamlūk efforts to assert control, if not sovereignty, in the region, which continued at least until the reign of al-Ashraf Shaʿbān (1363–77), resulted in no permanent control, and by the end of the period the Nubian kingdom had crumbled.

Diplomatic relations with Ethiopia during the reigns of Baybars and Qalāwūn ostensibly concerned the appointment of new bishops to the Ethiopian Church, which was affiliated with the Patriarchate of Alexandria. But these relations were not devoid of commercial importance. Worthy of note is, first, that diplomatic contacts with Ethiopia were carried on not by an overland route through Nubia but through ports on the Red Sea coast,¹³⁴ and second, that there was a resident population of Muslim merchants in Ethiopia. The fact that westerners such as Marino Sanudo knew about

¹³¹ Donald P. Little, "The History of Arabia during the Bahri Mamlūk Period According to Three Mamlūk Historians," in *Studies in the History of Arabia*. I. *Sources for the History of Arabia*, Part 2 (Riyadh, 1979), 20–21.

¹³² Garcin, *Qūs*, 211–18; Northrup, *Slave to Sultan*, 141–45.

¹³³ Holt, *Age of the Crusades*, 131.

¹³⁴ Garcin, *Qūs*, 220.

Ethiopia and its role in the spice trade with India also indicates the commercial importance of Ethiopia.¹³⁵ Both Baybars and Qalāwūn were approached by the negus of Abyssinia to approve the nomination and dispatch of a patriarch. Though we do not know the results of the requests, the two parties had a mutual interest in cooperation, for the safety of the resident merchants might be assured in exchange for compliance with the Ethiopian requests.

While there is no explicit statement in the sources linking increased activity in the Red Sea region and the east during the last decades of the thirteenth century with the appearance of Genoese-Īlkhānid cooperation, it seems quite likely that their grip on the north-south route, coupled with the Genoese push eastward, affected Mamlūk diplomatic and commercial policy in the region in two ways, with regard to the recruitment of mamlūks and to the increasing commercial competition between east and west. While Qalāwūn's deliberate efforts to recruit mamlūks from diverse, non-Kipchak, sources have been attributed to his desire to balance the power of his mainly Kipchak mamlūk forces with other ethnic groups, it also seems probable that the possibility of a Genoese-Īlkhān'id blockade on trade with the Golden Horde was a second powerful incentive. Thus, Qalāwūn not only recruited mamlūks of Circassian origin from whom he created the Burjī regiment, but he actually advertised for mamlūks and slave girls (*jawāri*) in his famous epistle (*mithāl*) of 1288 addressed to the rulers of Sind, Hind, China and the Yemen, offering trade incentives and proclaiming the virtues of Egypt to merchants who responded.¹³⁶

The foreign and commercial affairs of the Bahṛī sultanate during the fourteenth century, even during the latter half of it, contrast sharply with those in the second half of the thirteenth. During the third reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad Egypt attained its greatest stability and prosperity. The conclusion of peace with the Īlkhānids, and their demise upon the death of the khān Abū Sa'īd in 1335, left Egypt the unchallenged power in the region. No military threat of the magnitude of the Mongols or even the crusaders presented itself. Egypt had also survived the economic effects of the Mongol conquests elsewhere and successfully managed its commercial relations. In this regard it is of interest to note that al-Nāṣir Muḥammad took as a bride the daughter of the khān of the Golden Horde. The only clouds on the horizon were the continuing trade war between east and west and the disturbances along the frontier and in Syria caused by the rise of a number of Turkoman principalities in Anatolia.

It is of some interest that peace between the Mongols and the Mamlūks

¹³⁵ Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1250-1527* (Oxford, 1972), 43-44, 76-85; Garcin, *Qūṣ*, 222-25.

¹³⁶ Northrup, *Slave to Sultan*, 147.

was negotiated with the help of one of the sultan's slave merchants, Majd al-Dīn al-Sallāmī. The treaty concluded in 1322 ended the military and commercial threat posed by the Īlkhānids. The potential for an Īlkhānid military and political alliance with the west had never been realized. None of the proposals to cut Mamlūk trade had ever been implemented. During the fourteenth century economics, rather than religion or politics, dictated that trade continue despite papal restrictions and, indeed, despite the prohibitions placed on trade with the Mamlūks by the commercial republics themselves. The struggle for commercial advantage, however, went on even without Īlkhānid assistance to the Genoese. Lacking a navy or merchant marine of its own, the Mamlūk sultanate was dependent on the Kārimī merchants who monopolized the commerce of the sultanate, especially the spice trade, in the Red Sea and the eastern oceans. In the Mediterranean, however, western commercial powers, among which Genoa, Venice and Aragon still figured most prominently, were supreme. The brawl which broke out in Alexandria in 1327 between Muslims and foreign (Christian) merchants may have been fueled by foreign Christian–Muslim (Kārimī) rivalry over trade as much as by religious sentiments. In this case it seems that the Mamlūk regime punished the Kārimīs, perhaps in an effort to diminish their monopoly, and favored the Europeans, from whom it obtained commodities of military importance such as timber and iron.¹³⁷ The competition may have been sharpened by the fact that Egypt from about the mid-fourteenth century seems to have regained the Red Sea spice trade carried on as a result of the disruption to the northern routes engendered by Īlkhānid territorial dismemberment.

During the second half of the fourteenth century the struggle continued in the eastern Mediterranean as Egypt fought with Cyprus over Cilician Armenia. Since the fall of Acre in 1291 Armenian ports, in particular Ayās, had become the main outlet in the Mediterranean for trade between the Christian west and the east, and to a certain extent it must have been in competition with Alexandria. The Armenian ports were closely linked with Cyprus. In 1322 the Mamlūks attacked Ayās and received tribute from it. The temporary occupation of the Armenian capital Sis in 1337 was followed in 1355 by that of the ports of Ṭarsūs, Adhāna, and Maṣṣīṣa on the southern coast of Anatolia. Through these ports flowed commodities of military importance such as wood, iron and of course slaves, but also luxury items such as silk and spices.¹³⁸ Mamlūk attempts to extend control over south-eastern Anatolia, coupled with Venetian efforts to establish direct trading relations with the Mamlūk regime in Egypt and along the Syrian coast, left Cyprus, with which the Venetians had previously dealt, at a commercial

¹³⁷ Ashtor, *Levant Trade*, 52–54.

¹³⁸ Irwin, *Middle East*, 145.

disadvantage. Thus it seems clear that the Cypriot attack led by King Peter I of Lusignan, which rocked Alexandria in 1365, though styled a crusade, was, in fact, fueled by commercial rather than religious interests.¹³⁹ Though the Cypriot "Crusade" would have a long-term economic and psychological impact on Egypt, it could not compare with the challenges of the previous century. The Mamlūks, in any case, prevailed; Sīs was conquered during the reign of al-Ashraf Sha'bān (1363–77), followed by Cyprus during the reign of the Circassian sultan Barsbāy in the early fifteenth century.

Mamlūk efforts to assert control over Anatolia, which were without doubt commercially motivated, led to increasing involvement with various Turkoman groups in the region who now emerged in the wake of Īlkhānid decline. Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad acted decisively against his viceroy in Syria, Tankiz al-Ḥusāmī, when he suspected him of plotting an alliance with the Dhu'l-Qadrids, a Turkoman regime which had risen in the 1330s with Tankiz's help, an alliance which, if allowed to flourish, would have posed a potential danger to the sultanate. The attractiveness of such an alliance to mamlūk would-be rulers was demonstrated once again when in 1352 the renegade governor of Aleppo joined forces with the Dhu'l-Qadrid chief to march on Damascus. The rebels were eventually captured and executed in 1354 with the help of Maḥmūd ibn Eretna, whose father, another Anatolian adventurer, had carved out a principality for himself which included several centers on the slave trade route to the north.¹⁴⁰ The Turkoman principalities of Anatolia continued to cause disturbances along the frontier until the end of Bahrī rule and beyond. Nevertheless, this period might be considered the calm before the storm, for neither Timūr-Lenk (Tamerlane) nor the Ottomans had yet cast their shadow over the sultanate.

The ascent of the Circassian dynasty

The formative period of Bahrī rule had coincided with a time of crisis in Egypt and in the region. The institutions and patterns of rule which evolved then were characterized by moral rigor and military discipline. In contrast, the fourteenth century, as a consequence of the Mamlūk-Mongol peace treaty of 1322 and the dissolution of the Īlkhānid regime soon after, brought relative peace and prosperity to the land. Mamlūk resources could now be directed to other than military ends. Paradoxically, although the idea of a Qalāwūnid succession was now accepted, perhaps even, desired by the populace, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, not himself of slave origin, seems to have been plagued by insecurity with respect to the mamlūk elite. Simultaneously, another aspect of sultani authority, the role of warrior, had evaporated as

¹³⁹ Irwin, *Middle East*, 145. Cf. Holt, *Age of the Crusades*, 125.

¹⁴⁰ Irwin, *Middle East*, 140.

the more peaceful conditions of the century made themselves apparent. These seem to be among the factors which prompted al-Nāṣir to assert autocratic control over the mamlūk elite. In addition to emphasizing his Kipchak ties and purchasing more mamlūks than any of his predecessors, he also sought to buy the support of his own young mamlūks and others with gifts, rapid promotion and marriage alliances, even with his own mamlūks, in contrast to earlier, more spartan, policies. Al-Nāṣir's successful effort to redistribute economic resources to his own advantage and that of the mamlūk elite by the *rawk* of 1315–16 seriously damaged the military caliber of the *ḥalqa* corps which had hitherto constituted an important element of the Mamlūk army, and which, it might be added, had provided a means for the regime to gain the support of important non-Mamlūk groups such as the *awlād al-nās* and *wāfidiyya* for its aims by incorporating them within the mamlūk military structure. These reforms, however, brought about a revolution in mamlūk "ethics" which ultimately resulted in a partial demamlūkization and demilitarization of the mamlūk structure, undermined the bases of Bahri rule and made the rise of Barqūq possible.

The negative impact of these reforms, however, was exacerbated by several other factors, namely, factional politics and its interplay with the succession in the post-Nāṣirid period, the arrival of the bubonic plague in Egypt in 1347–48 and subsequent occurrences of pneumonic plague thereafter, the attack on Alexandria in 1365 by the Cypriot crusader forces of Peter I of Lusignan, titular ruler of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, and the worsening economic situation, a consequence in particular of a trade imbalance which Egypt was suffering during the latter half of the century. Following al-Nāṣir's death in 1341 he was succeeded in rapid succession by no fewer than eight sons, two grandsons and two great-grandsons, most of whom, as minors, ruled nominally. Effective power was in the hands of the amīrs of the dominant factions, although the Qalāwūnid sultans still controlled a large share of the wealth of Egypt in allodial lands and *iqṭā's*. The factional feuding of this period no doubt created instability, although one may find a certain logic in these struggles, imbedded as they were in factional interests. Of the post Nāṣirid sultans only al-Nāṣir Ḥasan (1347–51) had a significant impact on events. Although non-Mamlūk elements had, at least since al-Nāṣir's reign, penetrated the mamlūk elite structure, al-Nāṣir Ḥasan actively encouraged this trend, raising *awlād al-nās*, eunuchs and even women to high status, thus further undermining the basis of Bahri rule. Perhaps he prepared the way for a mamlūk backlash, which eventually came in the form of Barqūq.

Even more serious was the arrival of the bubonic plague in 1347 at a time when the country was also experiencing famine. Egypt never recovered, for subsequently the country suffered an estimated fifty-five outbreaks of infectious pneumonic plague with even higher mortality levels than those

experienced in 1347–8. The civilian population was affected more seriously than the mamlūk elite by the bubonic plague, but the pneumonic plague spared no one. The mamlūk military structure was thus further weakened by the decimation of the mamlūk ranks, and in addition, by the effect of the plague also on agricultural productivity, the main source of revenues for the regime and for the organization of the army. Those most affected were, as Udovitch notes, the mamlūk class and the beneficiaries of rural *waqfs*. Consequently, the Mamlūk regime was forced to make up for losses in agricultural revenues by preying on the profits of the urban market place, which prospered in these conditions. Simultaneously, however, the chronic shortage of specie, which by 1359 had become “fairly acute,” compounded by a lack of exports and a consequent imbalance in trade, contributed to a worsening economic situation.¹⁴¹ Thus despite the relative tranquility of the fourteenth century and the illusion of prosperity, not all was well.

It is against this background that the rise of Barqūq and the Circassian dynasty must be seen. Nevertheless, it was the reforms of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, which had led to demamlūkization and the possibility of the rapid ascent of junior mamlūks to the highest ranks, which ultimately made the rise of Barqūq possible. Yalbughā al-‘Umarī, a mamlūk of the sultan al-Nāṣir Ḥasan, having become leader of a faction which resented the favour shown by his master to non-mamlūk groups, killed al-Nāṣir Ḥasan in 1361. As regent for the young sultan Ḥājji (1381–82, 1389–90), whom he deposed, and then of the ten-year-old al-Ashraf Sha‘bān, Yalbughā undertook the remamlūkization of the Mamlūk state and military. In 1366 al-Ashraf Sha‘ban threw his support behind a rival mamlūk faction, but Yalbughā was killed in the fighting which ensued. Al-Ashraf Sha‘ban ruled in his own right until 1377 when, as he travelled to Mecca to make the pilgrimage, he was captured and later killed by a group of rebellious mamlūks.

Barqūq was not a royal mamlūk as Kitbughā, Lājīn and Baybars al-Jāsh-nikīr had been. Rather he was the mamlūk of the amīr Yalbughā. Of Circassian origin, Barqūq had been recruited in about 1363–64 and had participated in the overthrow of al-Ashraf Sha‘bān. Thereafter, his rise to power was meteoric. By 1378 he had attained the post of *atābak al-‘asākīr*, which now, in contrast to the earlier period, meant simply “senior amīr.” Initially he exercised power with a colleague, but by 1380 had ousted him. Then with the support of Yalbughā’s *khushdāshīyya*, Barqūq seized power in 1382. The *cursus honorum* of the thirteenth century was extinct. Barqūq had reached the pinnacle of power in just a little less than twenty years.

¹⁴¹ In Robert Lopez, Harry Miskimin, and Abraham Udovitch, “England to Egypt, 1350–1500: Long-term Trends and Long-distance Trade,” in M. A. Cook (ed.), *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East from the Rise of Islam to the Present Day* (London, 1970), 123–24.

Immediately, he was faced with rebellions in Syria reminiscent of those faced by Baybars I and Qalāwūn. But rather than staying the course as had his predecessors, Barqūq was forced to flee for the time being. Ḥājjī, now with the regnal title al-Muẓaffar, was restored to the throne. In the meantime, however, Barqūq, in exile at Karak, gathered support and seized power once again in 1390, thus establishing the Burjī or Circassian regime.

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II

The regime of the Circassian Mamlūks

JEAN-CLAUDE GARCIN



The regime of the Circassian Mamlūks, or the "state of the Circassians" as contemporaries called it to distinguish it from the state of the Turks, formed a bridge between Egypt's most brilliant medieval period and the beginning of the sixteenth century which we, in Europe, see as the beginning of modern times. The use of the ethnic criterion to designate this period shows that the change in the origin of the dominant class had been felt to be a major factor that had to be taken into account in explaining the political evolution. It might also be thought that this change did not explain every aspect of an ongoing process, some results of which were maintained under the Ottoman administration.

The general development

First we shall consider the major phases of this lengthy period (1382–1517), summarizing only briefly the military confrontations and international relations which, while not the subject of this chapter, cannot be overlooked when interpreting internal political changes. Four major phases of varying length are apparent.

This first period saw the restoration of the Mamlūk state under the amīr al-Malik al-Zāhir Barqūq (1382–1389). Barqūq, who contrived to impose his exclusive authority from 1378, under the sultanate of the two sons of al-Malik al-Ashraf Sha'bān (al-Malik al-Manšūr 'Alī and then al-Malik al-Šāliḥ Ḥajjī, whose *atābak* he was and whose mother he had married) acceded to the sultanate as Qalāwūn had done in former times. Save for a break when he would have to accept the return to the throne of his ousted ward (in 1389–90), he would wield power until his death in 1399. The tradition of the classic Mamlūk regime was restored. The institutions had not changed. The sole innovation possibly attributable to Barqūq, while he was still only *atābak*, was the division of Egypt into three *niyābat al-salṭanat* as in Syria, the better to control the countryside where order was still being threatened

by the growing strength of the Bedouin;¹ Berbers from the Delta, the Hawwāra, were moved into Upper Egypt to keep the Arabs in check, and the sultan's authority was reaffirmed.

Barqūq was Circassian and he had promptly purchased mamlūks of that race. From 1383, non-Circassian elements (Kurds and Turks) had been attempting unsuccessfully to overthrow him, with the support of Caliph al-Mutawakkil, who was quickly arrested and replaced in the caliphate. The opposition resumed shortly afterwards, led by Yalbughā al-Nāṣirī, a former mamlūk of al-Malik al-Nāṣir Ḥasan; like Barqūq, he had become a mamlūk of Yalbughā al-'Umarī. Senior to Barqūq, and as such feared and clumsily ousted, he was joined by Miṭṭāsh, a former mamlūk of al-Malik al-Ashraf Sha'bān, governor of Syria, very hostile to the Circassians. Barqūq was besieged in the Citadel and had to abdicate and serve a term in prison in Syria before returning to eliminate his two rivals. After this episode, which amazed his contemporaries, the sultan's power was not threatened again. His financial resources had increased since the special office (*dīwān al-mufrad*), set up to manage the *iqṭā'āt* of his son, Muḥammad, had transformed its function, after the prince's death, to enhance the revenues of the private office (*dīwān al-Khāṣṣ*). The sultanate was increasingly well financed.

Externally, the position of the Mamlūk state was beginning to be challenged. In Anatolia in 1387, a Mamlūk army had obliged Siwās to recognize Egyptian suzerainty. The attitude of the newcomers to the region, the Ak Qoyunlū and Kara Qoyunlū, was closely watched, especially at the approach of Timūr-Lenk; in 1394, Barqūq had confronted him on the Euphrates but Timūr-Lenk had withdrawn. More ominous was the advance of the Ottomans; the Karamānids had been absorbed, an Ottoman protégé had been placed at the head of the Dhu'l-Qadirids and immediately following the sultan's death in 1399, Ottoman troops had penetrated Mamlūk territory in the southeast. The solidity of Mamlūk power was to be put to the test.

In this critical situation, the establishment on the throne of al-Malik al-Nāṣir Faraj, Barqūq's eleven-year-old son, should have led very quickly to his eviction in favour of one of his father's mamlūks. But it was not until 1412 that, from their base in Syria, the rebel amīrs, Tanam, Jakam and then Nawrūz and Shaykh, managed to defeat the young sultan who had defended his power with all the ardour (he led no fewer than seven expeditions against the Syrian amīrs) but also the cruelty, that a struggle of this nature gave rise to. Even then, in order to overthrow him, the amīrs had to acclaim Caliph al-Musta'in as sultan; his indisputable legitimacy cost the sultan, then in

¹ Al-Maqrizi, *Kitāb al-sulūk li-ma'rifat duwal al-mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Sa'id 'Abd al-Fattāh 'Āshūr, 4 vols. (Cairo, 1956-72), III, 340, 394.

Damascus, the backing of non-Circassian elements and of the population of the town who supported him. The prolonged nature of this crisis may be explained initially by the dramatic circumstances then affecting the Mamlūk state.

In 1399 Timūr-Lenk had resumed his march westward and taken Aleppo, allowing it to be pillaged. The sultan's entourage, intent on assuring their political fortunes, chose to take the prince back to Cairo, abandoning Damascus to the ravages of Timūr-Lenk. In 1402 the Mongol then withdrew to Ankara so as to break the power of the Ottomans, who posed a strategic threat to him. So, paradoxically, it was the Ottomans who saved Egypt from invasion. But in 1403, a low Nile flood caused famine in the country, followed by plague in 1405. The epidemic, which was more lastingly damaging to Egypt than the outbreak of 1347-8, exacerbated the problem of the amīrs' feuding. The Bedouin, profiting from the fact that the army was entirely taken up with internal conflicts and paralyzed by the external threat, rose in revolt. It seems that from 1401 to 1413 the Mamlūk provincial authorities had been swept right out of Upper Egypt; we know the name of no governor in this period and the taxes that should have supplied the revenues of sultans and amīrs could not be collected.² Barqūq's domestic achievements were thus reduced to nothing. On the frontiers, the Ak Qoyunlū who had supported Timūr-Lenk were installed at Diyār Bakr; the Kara Qoyunlū had formed a Mesopotamian domain perilously close by; the only positive point was in Anatolia where there was a long-term reduction in the Ottomans' power, but the Mamlūks had no part in that. Throughout their domains their prestige was tarnished. The only gold coinage still in circulation was that of Venice. The capital, Cairo, was in grievous straits.

It was in the aftermath of this crisis that the main features characteristic of the Circassian state gradually manifested themselves. The situation had first to be restored. After ten years, the regime had regained stability and credibility, and the Mamlūk sultanate had once more become a great and respected power. By common consent, it reached its apogee in the sultanate of Qāytbāy during the first part of his regime, before the hardships of the new conflict with the Ottomans once again compromised the stability of the sultanate. So several stages must be identified in the history of this second Mamlūk age.

The sultanate of Caliph al-Musta'īn lasted only six months, time enough for one of the amīrs, Shaykh, to establish himself in power in Cairo before finishing off his former ally, Nawrūz, who had thought to remain master of the situation by taking over the government of the Syrian provinces. One of the tasks of the new sovereign, al-Malik al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh, was to restore

² J.-C. Garcin, *Un centre musulman de la Haute Égypte médiévale: Qūs* (Cairo, 1976), 465-68.

the authority of the sultanate in a country where the structures for the maintenance of order had disappeared in some regions and where plague again struck in 1415–17 and 1420. It is not clear when a regional financial administration was restored throughout the realm. In order to replenish the royal Treasury, the *ustādār* in charge of the private office (*diwān al-mufrad*) was made responsible for sweeping fiscal expeditions into the provinces, where taxes were collected by force, a process that resembled outright plunder, under the guise of recouping unpaid taxes.

On the Anatolian border, a reorganized Mamlūk force again intervened from 1417; the sultan led another and the Mamlūk state regained its former role; the temporary removal of the Ottomans had made the task easy for the Mamlūks. It was a sign of renewed Mamlūk authority but there was little indication of new tactics. Shaykh appeared rather a restorer of the old order, even endeavouring to balance the influence of the Circassians in the army by starting to recruit Turks again. Before he died, it was to a Turkish *atābak* that he entrusted the guardianship of his infant son Aḥmad, who was proclaimed sultan despite being aged only twenty months.

Barqūq's Circassian mamlūks did not appreciate this loss of influence. A Circassian amīr, Ṭaṭar, then an officer of the audience (*amīr majlis*), removed the *atābak* and after first affirming the real position of that office by marrying the widow of the late sovereign, was proclaimed sultan. But when he died three months later, it was another of Barqūq's former Circassian mamlūks, the dawādār Barsbāy, who took over the guardianship of Ṭaṭar's young son and subsequently the sultanate (1422–38). So appeared one of the striking features of the new system: it was mamlūks of the most senior age groups who acceded to the sultanate. After Barsbāy, the sultans Jaqmaq (1438–53) and Aynāl (1453–61) had been Barqūq's mamlūks. It was only subsequently that one of Shaykh's mamlūks, Khushqadam, came to power (1461–67), and then one of Jaqmaq's mamlūks, Timurbughā (1467–68). Belonging to senior age groups, they came to power later and later in life: if Ṭaṭar was probably no more than fifty at the start of his sultanate, and Barsbāy no more than forty-five, both Jaqmaq and Aynāl were over seventy at their accession. The sultanate was acquiring the appearance of a military magistrature, no longer threatened by the ambition of the amīrs.

Credit for consolidating the new system falls to Barsbāy. Contemporaries reproached him for his "greed" and some modern historians have adopted this view.³ It seems, however, that his policies showed a great coherence which cannot be reduced to a single trait of character. Because of the epidemics that returned lethally every six to eight years, there was a drop in

³ A. Darrag, *L'Égypte sous le règne de Barsbay, 825–841/1422–1438* (Damascus, 1961), 436–39.

the total resources that realistically could be expected from the agrarian lands of Egypt. On the other hand, Timūr-Lenk's wars and those of the Turcomans in Mesopotamia and Iraq had made the Red Sea the safest route for the shipment of spices. Barsbāy had the idea of ensuring the exclusive rights of this transit route to Egypt, and to the sultanate the exclusive rights of trade with the Europeans. These, it seems, were the considerations dictating the policy followed in the years 1425–27. To make sure that it would not be the princes of the Yemen who reaped the benefits of this situation, merchants were encouraged to discharge their merchandise at Jedda (where a major customs was set up) rather than at Aden. In Egypt itself, the sultanate's monopoly over the sale of spices was established, a decision that had manifold consequences. It obviously struck a blow at Muslim free trade, in particular that of the spice merchants (*Kārimīs*), and Barsbāy was accused of having played into the hands of the European traders. The caravan trails of the Hijāz had to be more assiduously protected against the activities of Bedouin brigands. In the Mediterranean it was necessary to take stronger measures against Catalan and Genoese pirates who descended on the Egyptian coast, and the two campaigns against Cyprus (in 1425 and 1426, in which the king was taken prisoner), on the grounds that it assisted the pirates, must, it seems, be seen in the context of this policy of the sultan. Jaqmaq attempted to pursue the same policy, with less success, against Rhodes between 1440 and 1444. The ransom paid by the Cypriot king had allowed Barsbāy to strike a new gold coinage, whereas from the beginning of the century the ducat had been supplanting the *dīnār* even in Egypt. So the sultan possessed all the resources necessary for consolidating his authority.

Internally, inspectors (*kāshif*, *kushshāf*) were set up over the local governors in order to control the Bedouin more effectively.⁴ However, the advantages won by the tribes had to be acknowledged; thus in Upper Egypt it had to be accepted that the Hawwāra amirs, established by Barqūq, had become a local power, rich from their lands and their trade with central Africa and, in the eyes of some people, good, respectable and educated Muslims. Along the borders, affirmation of Mamlūk greatness had to continue. Even though Ottoman power, restored after 1413, was applied more prudently than in the past, the principalities of Anatolia had to be made to accept that acknowledgment of Mamlūk hegemony constituted a balancing factor. In Iraq, the Ak Qoyunlū, locked in conflict with their rivals, showed little respect for Mamlūk territory. In 1429, the Mamlūk troops sacked Edessa in response to one of their raids; the atrocities committed by the army against civilian Muslim populations scandalized their contemporaries and were of little value as an example. An expedition

⁴ Garcin, *Un centre musulman*, 477 et seq.

in 1433, led by Barsbāy in person, against the capital of the Ak Qoyunlū, Amid, failed to take it but ended well with formal recognition of Mamlūk hegemony, though it left the impression that the army had not regained its former efficiency. On the other hand, and this too is one of the features of this period, recruits presented successive sultans, Barsbāy from 1428, Jaqmaq from 1442, Aynāl from 1454 and Khushqadam from 1463, with serious problems of indiscipline in the capital itself. The recurrence of these disturbances, of a kind previously unknown and affecting a fundamental element of the regime, amounted to an indication of fragility that could not be ignored.

The long sultanate of Qāyrbāy (1468–1496) is traditionally held to mark the happy culmination of the Circassian regime. On the death of Khushqadam in 1467, two *atābaks*, Yalbāy and Timurbaghā, were successively proclaimed sultan; they failed in the difficult task of controlling the pressure groups in the army and it was Qāyrbāy, Barsbāy's former mamlūk and now an *atābak* himself, who was raised to the sultanate after the enforced, but agreed and understandable withdrawal of his predecessor. Thanks to his political astuteness, he managed to get control of the situation, keeping a balance between the groups and their representatives, the amīr Azbak on the one hand, who was the new *atābak* and another former mamlūk of Barsbāy's and on the other, the dawādār Yashbak min Maḥdī, a relative of the sultan and former mamlūk of Jaqmaq. Generally a first period of this reign is identified, lasting till 1481. The sultan appeared to have complete confidence in the stability of his position; he would leave the capital for long tours of inspection in Alexandria, the Fayyūm or Syria (four months in 1478). The Bedouin tribes seemed under firmer control. In Upper Egypt, as from 1466, general tribal unrest had seemed to be on the point of disrupting the country; the amīr Yashbak was given a mission of inspection (*kashf*) over the whole of the south and the authority of the sultan was reestablished, at times with great brutality. In 1477 even the Hawwāra amirate was virtually suppressed; this amounted to imposing the law of the Mamlūk state without seeking the support of one tribal group against another. Not since the beginning of the century had a sultan achieved such results. Egypt seemed prosperous once more. In the capital, the sultan invested in buildings, an example followed by Yashbak and Azbak. Cairo had become a beautiful city again.

Yet the problem of the recruits' turbulence had still not been solved, though it did not resurface until 1473. At that date the sultan had already been faced with a resumption of Ottoman pressure. The Karamānid principality, traditionally a vassal of the sultan, was occupied, and a hostile Dhu'l-Qadirid prince, Shāh Sūwār, encouraged by the Ottomans, had been defeated only after several military setbacks to the north of Aleppo in 1468 and 1469. The Mamlūk state had been momentarily relieved of the Ottoman

danger by the intervention of the Ak Qoyunlū chieftain Uzun Ḥasan, but support for him was ruled out because of his alliance with the Europeans, and when he was conquered by the Ottomans in 1473 and his empire broke up, the annexation of the Karamānids by the Ottomans became irreversible and a new pro-Ottoman Dhu'l-Qadirid prince was installed in 1479. Conflict with the Ottomans appeared unavoidable. It was probably hastened by a blunder by Qāyrbāy; he had thought he could welcome and temporarily shelter in Cairo an Ottoman crown prince removed from power after the death of Mehmet II in 1481. The Ottomans had at first merely stepped up support for their Dhu'l-Qadirid protégé but then joined in the fight themselves from 1483. To face up to what had become a direct confrontation, successive armies had to be equipped and sent to the front in 1484, 1485–86, 1488, 1489 and 1490. The Mamlūks had the last word; they were able to penetrate as far as Kayseri and the peace was signed in 1491, helped by a change of heart on the part of the Dhu'l-Qadirid, now aware that he was in danger of being the next prey to Ottoman ambition. Up to a point, then, the result was positive. The Ottomans, heavily committed elsewhere in the Mediterranean or the Balkans, had resigned themselves to ending their aggressive attitude. But the internal balance of the Mamlūk state had been compromised.

The destabilization had been becoming apparent from the 1480s in several ways. With the army on the borders, the maintenance of order in the provinces was less secure; once again the Bedouin were a power to be reckoned with, and had become virtually uncontrollable from 1485–86 on. In Upper Egypt, the Hawwāra amīrs had reasserted their authority: they were now the natural masters of the country and would remain so. In the capital the sultan had quickly to recruit ever more troops on a continuing basis; they could not immediately be assimilated and pressure from them again became a major problem. From 1481, the dawādār Yashbak, who had incurred their hostility, chose to leave Cairo and Egypt to go and try his luck (it proved fatal) in the Ak Qoyunlū domains, then in complete turmoil. One of his relatives, the amīr Qānšūh Khamsmiyya, had then been promoted grand amīr akhūr (in charge of the sultan's stables), while the post of dawādār devolved on the amīr Aqbirdi, a relative of the sultan. The insubordination of the recruits intensified from 1486 in the context of price rises that devalued their pay; it reached such a pitch that in 1489 the sultan made a show of abdicating. From 1491, hostility had broken out between Qānšūh Khamsmiyya and Aqbirdi and the recruits took sides with one or other amīr, thinking that one of them would replace the aging sultan. Qāyrbāy was less and less able to dominate the situation. In 1495, the old *atābak* Azbak allowed himself to be drawn into Qānšūh Khamsmiyya's faction but the coup d'état failed and Azbak was forced into exile in the Ḥijāz. However, even before the old sultan's death, the Qānšūh Khamsmiyya faction had imposed Qāyrbāy's son Muḥammad, with Qānšūh

Khamsmiyya as *atābak*. The long sultanate ended in political unrest, the price of a conservatism that had been unable to see and overcome its problems.⁵

The end of the state of the Circassians was in fact marked by two crises. There was first a long political crisis (1496–1501), which resulted in the situation left by Qāyrbāy and made contemporaries believe that Mamlūk power would not recover. Subsequently, under the sultanate of Qānshūh al-Ghawri (1501–16), who had managed to restore the political situation, there was a more damaging crisis, caused by European pressure in the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean, which, directly and indirectly, sapped the resources of the sultanate. The confrontation with the Ottomans, in which the regime was to disappear, occurred only belatedly and rather unexpectedly, but the weaknesses of the Mamlūk state were decisive by then.

As in the case of Barqūq, Qāyrbāy's disappearance was not followed in short order by the swift deposition of his son al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad in favour of the *atābak* Qānshūh Khamsmiyya. This claimant came up against the unforeseen opposition of the sultan's immediate entourage, led by the amir Qānshūh Qānshūh (later al-Zāhir), a simple palace official but the brother of the concubine who was the sultan's mother; he resisted even though the amirs had already agreed to the deposition. After some violent fighting in Cairo, Qānshūh Khamsmiyya was obliged to flee and was killed. Aqbirdi, for his part, had to retire to Syria where he eventually died. Qāyrbāy's recruits, gathered round the fifteen-year-old sultan who was said to be unbalanced, remained in control, and demanded that resources be found for the maintenance of the army. The amirs of Qānshūh Khamsmiyya's clan finally rallied to the sultan's uncle and, in an attempt to get things under control at the instigation of one of Qāyrbāy's mamlūks, the second *dawādār* Tūmānbāy, they had the prince assassinated in 1498 and acclaimed Qānshūh Qānshūh as sultan. The new ruler could see no other solution than to tax the elites in order to meet the needs of the recruits, so the amirs abandoned him and Tūmānbāy then pressed the sultanate on the *atābak* Jānbālā, a former mamlūk of Yashbak (1500–01), so as to be in a position to seize power himself in 1501. Since it soon became apparent that Tūmānbāy's policies differed little from those of his predecessors, the amirs then put the *dawādār* Qānshūh al-Ghawri on the throne. He alone proved capable of exacting obedience from the recruits and payment of taxes from the notables, a price that had to be paid for a return to tranquility. These five years, marked in addition in the provinces by the rebellion of other amirs, insecurity, and Bedouin turbulence, as well as a return of plague, formed a tragic epilogue to the sultanate of Qāyrbāy.

⁵ Carl Petry, *Twilight of Majesty: The Reigns of the Mamlūk Sultans al-Ashraf Qāyrbāy and Qānshūh al-Ghawri in Egypt* (Seattle, 1993), 234.

The atypical character of the last great Mamlūk sultan, Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī (1501–1516), has been well portrayed.⁶ After his accession to power, a few revolts by recruits in 1508 and 1510 must still be recorded; these were the result of deficiencies in the services charged with maintaining the mamlūks, but the sultan was able to stand firm. His chief concern was to keep his treasury well filled, often by highly disreputable means. But the stability of the regime was abruptly compromised in a different way. The threat came, not from the Ottomans who had made no attempt to take advantage of the five years of crisis, but from the Europeans. In 1498, Vasco da Gama had appeared in the Indian Ocean and in 1501 Muslim ships had been sunk off Calicut in Kerala; in 1503 a Portuguese squadron was cruising at the entrance to the Red Sea. The sultan found himself faced simultaneously with an advance that endangered the holy paces, of which he was protector, and a decline in royal revenues. The provinces were again subject almost every year to the same expeditions to collect taxes by force, amounting almost to pillage, as under Shaykh's rule; they were now led by the *dawādār*. From 1505 an armed force had to be dispatched to the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, and in 1508 trials to create an artillery unit began. The European threat demanded a new type of riposte which appeared unseemly to contemporaries accustomed to the classic Mamlūk army.

The threat was felt too on the Mediterranean shore which Qāytbāy had already started to fortify. Ships began to be built on both seas. The alliance with the Ottomans was strengthened; since 1502, they were themselves confronted by the Šafavid movement, also linked with Europe. Egypt was thus able to obtain timber and iron. After the defeat of the Egyptian fleet off Diu in 1500, it was the Red Sea that had to be defended. From 1511, Ottoman consignments of guns and powder reached Alexandria, accompanied by shipwrights and sailors. In the same year, al-Ghawrī created a corps of fusiliers, known as the "Fifth Corps," or corps of the "Fifth Instalment" (of pay), recruited from outside the mamlūk traditions. But had the sultan the means for this policy? The army was now enlarged, and henceforth any way of finding the resources for it was good enough. From 1511, too, delays in paying the troops (distributions of meat, barley, uniforms) reappeared and the recruits were grumbling again. In 1514 came renewed riots. The sultan was accused of having emptied the Treasury for the benefit of a military contingent alien to the mamlūk tradition and so compromising the existence of the army; the mamlūk veterans joined with the recruits and, although afraid of them, stirred them up surreptitiously against the sultan, whom the recruits normally supported.

⁶ Petry, *Twilight of Majesty*, 167–73.

It was under these circumstances that the situation changed one last time. In 1512, in order to organize resistance to the Šafavids, Salim seized power in Constantinople; in 1514 he led his army into Anatolia where a confrontation took place in August at Chaldiran. But neither al-Ghawrī, despite being aided by the Ottomans in the Red Sea, nor the Dhu'l-Qadirids could bring themselves to rally to his side; they were frightened at the sight of an Ottoman army so close to their domains. Once victory had been won, Salim came back to wreak vengeance, first on the Dhu'l-Qadirids and then he set about the Mamlūk empire which was totally unable to fight against the enemies of Islam. The engagement took place at Marj Dābiq, to the north of Aleppo, on August 24, 1516, where al-Ghawrī lost his life. The mamlūk veterans had borne the brunt, but they felt they were being sacrificed to the recruits who showed little fight and fell back; the Ottoman fusiliers did the rest, since the Mamlūk fusiliers were stationed on the Red Sea. In this engagement the problem of how the army was constituted had come up again and had proved decisive. Syria was easily invaded. The amīr Tūmānbāy, a nephew of al-Ghawrī and serving *dawādār*, was proclaimed sultan. He attempted to resist by hastily assembling an artillery field and a fusilier corps, but Cairo's defences were easily outflanked. In April 1517 the last Mamlūk sultan was hanged under Bāb Zuwayla. Khayrbak, governor of Aleppo and long-time supporter of the Ottomans, was put in charge of Cairo, the Delta and Middle Egypt; in Upper Egypt, the Hawwāra amīrs, who had rallied to the Ottoman cause, were acknowledged as masters of the country.

The characteristics of the new Mamlūk system

In the course of the general developments we have described, the Mamlūk system experienced appreciable modifications compared with what it had been in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. They are characteristic of the Circassian state.

The political changes in the Mamlūk system seem to be linked to two basic causes: the ethnic solidarity of the Circassians and the steady relative growth, for successive and differing reasons, of the financial means available to the sultans, compared with the revenues of the amīrs as a whole.

When Barqūq came to power after the death of al-Malik al-Ashraf Sha'bān in 1377, the mamlūk system had not significantly changed. Barqūq probably had some of his former comrades against him but he clashed mainly with the mamlūks of his predecessor Sha'bān, led by Miṭāsh, who, moreover, was hostile to the Circassians, as we have seen. His political skill enabled him to return to the sultanate. Having learnt from the experience, he bought a great many mamlūks (5,000, it is said) from among the

Circassians (or the Greeks); these were the Zāhiris.⁷ Their maintenance was soon the chief duty of the *diwān al-mufrad*, created in 1383.⁸ If there had already been a considerable proportional increase in the financial resources of the sultans since the time of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, the creation of the *diwān al-mufrad* accentuated this phenomenon. The resources available now allowed any sultan to recruit mamlūks swiftly. This probably partially explains Faraj's long resistance to his father's amirs; in the classic system, they would have got rid of him quickly and replaced him with one of their own.

Once in power, Shaykh too was able more easily to buy mamlūks: the Mu'ayyadīs. He did so by attempting to return (although not exclusively) to Turkish mamlūks⁹ and that was enough to ensure subsequently that the Mu'ayyadīs were the object of lasting mistrust when the Circassians managed to seize power again. This they did in 1421, with the accession of Ṭaṭar.¹⁰ Contemporaries were amazed that within three months the sultan had succeeded in forming an infrastructure of mamlūks:¹¹ he had the financial means to do so. Barsbāy consolidated his achievement. By keeping the Mu'ayyadīs out of power, the ethnic cohesion of the Circassians created (no doubt unintentionally) the conditions for the formation of an aristocracy consisting of the former Circassian elite, in which those of longest standing were considered the most noble.

Barsbāy's sultanate marks a new stage. Thanks to the sultanate's monopolies, instituted in 1425–27, the sultan's resources grew again (proportionately) through the inflow of revenues not accessible to the amirs. The sultan took advantage of it to establish his power even more firmly and buy mamlūks (the Ashrafīs). From then on, the training time for mamlūks seems to have been reduced to twelve or eighteen months. From 1428, too, the problem first appeared of recruits who were unruly, not because they were not Circassians (they were, largely), nor because they would not have had a political future in the framework of their integration into the system, but because that integration could not happen fast enough. Faced with the recruits, the amirs, now with fewer mamlūks, found themselves at a loss. The rift between the old troops and newcomers brought about a corresponding strengthening of the move to form the older ones into an aristocracy. On Barsbāy's death in 1438, the recruits attempted to unite

⁷ Abu'l-Mahāsīn ibn Taghri Birdi, *Al-Nujūm al-zāhira fī mulūk miṣr wa'l-qāhira*, partial edn. W. Popper, University of California Publications in Semitic Philology (Berkeley, 1909–36), V, 597.

⁸ B. Martel-Thoumian, *Les civils et l'administration dans l'état mamlūk (IX^e–XV^e siècle)* (Damascus, 1991), 53.

⁹ Ibn Taghri Birdi, *Nujūm*, VI, 430.

¹⁰ Ibn Taghri Birdi, *Nujūm*, VI, 503–05.

¹¹ Ibn Taghri Birdi, *Nujūm*, VI, 519.

around his young son, Al Malik al-‘Azīz Yūsuf, who was thirteen. This was a complete reversal of the attitude adopted formerly, when the father’s mamlūks had to be wary of the late ruler’s son; in 1438 the young prince was obviously just a rallying point, but the situation would recur as would the outcome.

The recruits were more numerous, but, having been recently brought in, they were still only novice soldiers and had little understanding of Mamlūk politics. So they were easily defeated and set aside by Barqūq’s mamlūks and it was another of Barqūq’s mamlūks, Jaqmaq, who seized power in that same year of 1438. The troubles connected with the rapid recruitment of new mamlūks clearly recurred under Jaqmaq, as did the regrouping of the recruits around his son after Jaqmaq’s death in 1453. It was yet another of Barqūq’s mamlūks, Aynāl, who took it upon himself to remove them from power, this time by relying, at least temporarily, on Barsbāy’s former recruits who had been finally integrated into the system, were no longer the untried mass they had been originally and, after the death of their patron, had become a mamlūk group like any other. So recruits did finally become integrated, but more slowly, when no doubt they were older, and at the cost of serious political disturbances.

The phenomenon recurred, then, with Aynāl’s recruits; they had to be forcibly removed in 1461 when they attempted to regroup around his son – an episode that marks the complete integration of the mamlūks of the previous sultan, Jaqmaq. At that date, the group of the feared Mu’ayyadīs no longer constituted a serious force; they had joined the aristocracy, so it was possible to call on two of Shaykh’s former mamlūks, Khushqadam and Yalbāy, to assume the sultanate. Through weakness and lack of political astuteness, Yalbāy had been unable to remove his predecessor’s recruits so he was replaced by Timurbughā, one of Jaqmaq’s mamlūks, who, having proved equally incapable of resisting Kushqadam’s recruits, had to cede power in 1468 to Qāyrbāy, a former mamlūk of Barsbāy. So a new political mechanism had gradually been imposed: any amīr who rose to be sultan had first to remove his predecessor’s recruits, relying on the previous age group that had been kept in the wings until that point, which marked their genuine entry into the political arena. The initial rhythm of Mamlūk political life was thus much slowed down.

If, under Qāyrbāy, the usual disturbances caused by the recruits did not recur until 1473, that was probably because the hostilities along the Anatolian border had been responsible for a swifter integration of some and the physical elimination of others. The plague of 1477 had helped, too. There followed a few years of calm. After the departure of the amīr Yashbak, their aggression came into the spotlight again in 1482. The reason was probably that Qāyrbāy was engaged in skirmishes with the Ottomans which he thought would become open war, so he began to recruit very large

numbers of troops at a pace which precluded their being integrated. Although these troops fought well, an indication that the Mamlūk “matrix” was still training good soldiers, from 1486 the recruits started wanting to cash in on their participation in the fighting. They were the more violent because, though there were not enough resources to pay them regularly and to offset price rises, the Mamlūk aristocracy, now conscious of its status, flaunted excessive luxury. In the face of this aristocracy, the recruits had become mercenaries. However, the sultan continued to recruit, finding the resources in an exceptional system of taxation, justified by the war; he went so far as to levy *iqta'* revenues (1488) and even *awqāf* (1491), so building up important financial reserves which he tapped only under the threat of riots. Thus the war against the Ottomans marked one more stage in the (relative) growth of royal resources, some of which were saved and some spent recruiting yet more men.

We have seen that the consequences were dramatic. The Mamlūk aristocracy was now dividing into clans (for example the faction of Aqbirdī against that of Qānṣūh Khamsmiyya), foreshadowing the clans of the Ottoman period (their creators might vanish but the groups remained), and the recruits split up between the clans; this was the protracted crisis from 1496 to 1501 that almost brought about the collapse of the sultanate.

Only al-Ghawrī had the ability to bring the “iniquitous effect” of too high a level of recruitment (and inadequate integration) under control. This was made possible by the resources first amassed under a system of “taxation for war.” When al-Ghawrī succeeded in restoring order, we are told that there had never been such large numbers of troops (at least, under the Circassians).¹² Bearing in mind the real decline in wealth (plague struck again several times between 1492 and 1514) and the uselessness of the royal spice monopoly, which brought the sultan nothing at all after 1500, this exceptional taxation system was maintained, using the worst of methods: confiscation and extortion of funds under torture in the towns, tax-gathering expeditions in the countryside. This, with a restriction on traditional royal largesse in the form of pensions granted to “the people” (*al-nās*) vouchsafed ten years of internal calm. But when the European presence in the Indian Ocean required additional expenditure, the demands of the recruits were renewed. In the final engagement with the Ottomans, the division of the military class into recruits, more senior mamlūks and military aristocracy, even more than the absence of the mamlūk fusiliers, was the cause of the defeat.

The development we have described explains in broad outline the characteristic features of the Mamlūk system under the Circassians.

¹² Ibn Iyās, *Badā'i' al-Zuhūr fī Waqā'i' al-Duhūr*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā, (Cairo, 1960-61), IV, 14.

Like the first Mamlūk state, the state of the Circassians was legitimized by the sanction of an 'Abbāsīd caliph. Since the middle of the fourteenth century, the material situation of the 'Abbāsīd caliphs had improved. They were in charge of the sanctuary of Sayyida al-Nafisa and that associated them with big demonstrations of piety in Cairo life.¹³ They had become prominent religious figures. They had even managed to appear to be guarantors of the first Mamlūk tradition against the Circassian seizure of power: al-Mutawakkil, caliph since 1361, had thus been forced by Barqūq to step down in 1382 for having supported anti-Circassian intrigues. In order to replace him, the sultan had recourse to another branch of the 'Abbāsīd family as al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad had done in the fourteenth century. But the ploy failed; when his power was threatened, Barqūq attempted to rally public opinion by restoring al-Mutawakkil in 1390. The caliph had known better than to get too involved with the rebellious amīrs, and the prestige of the caliphate emerged from the test enhanced when Barqūq returned to power. Al-Musta'in succeeded his father, al-Mutawakkil, in 1405 and we have seen how the amīrs contrived to use the prestige of the caliphate to defeat Faraj in 1412. The sultan-caliph took his role seriously (a decree of al-Musta'in, carved in stone, is preserved at Ghazza)¹⁴ but for the amīrs it was nothing more than a political stratagem which came to an end after six months, when he was deposed simultaneously from the sultanate and the caliphate and exiled to Alexandria. After two other sons of al-Mutawakkil, men of religion who led exemplary lives, al-Qā'im was invested with the caliphate in 1451 and he too intervened in the political arena by supporting Aynāl in 1453 in his struggle against Jaqmaq's recruits: Aynāl's triumph reflected glory on the caliph who once more enjoyed great prestige. But he allowed himself to get involved in an attempted coup d'état against Aynāl the following year. Al-Qā'im too was exiled to Alexandria. After that, the caliphs never again stepped out of their role as symbols of Islamic legality, residing now in the Citadel, now in the caliph's palace in the Kabsh district. The sultans made a conventional show of deference to them. The last of them, al-Mutawakkil III, was at al-Ghawrī's side at Marj Dābiq; he was briefly held in great respect by the victor, then deported with other Cairo notables to Constantinople. The caliphate ended with him.¹⁵

The legal sanction of the caliphate was felt to be less and less necessary since the legitimacy of the sultanate was not established. The Mamlūk sultan even took the title of "sultan of Islam and the Muslims" under Jaqmaq.¹⁶ The quasi-symbolic *modus operandi* of the sultanate was maintained: a

¹³ Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Nujūm*, V, 383.

¹⁴ M. M. Sadek, *Mamlūkische Architektur der Stadt Gaza* (Berlin, 1991), 98–9.

¹⁵ J.-C. Garcin, "Histoire, opposition politique et piétisme traditionaliste dans le Husn al-Muḥāḍarar de Suyūṭī," *AI*, 7 (1967), 56–65.

¹⁶ Khalil Al-Zāhirī, *Kitāb zubda kashf al-mamālik*, ed. P. Ravaisse (Paris, 1894), 67.

"royal service" (*khidma*) was held in the morning shortly after sunrise in the presence of the confidential secretary (*kātib al-sirr*) and the amīrs, when decisions were taken concerning the military class, followed by the ceremonial meal with the chief amīrs.¹⁷ Sultans in the second half of the fifteenth century were at pains to give maximum publicity to sessions of the *mazālim* (royal dispensation of justice and decisions of a juridical nature concerning the administration of the state, taken in conjunction with the *qādis*). The sultan always entered Cairo (and Damascus and Aleppo) in solemn procession, preceded by cantors and the yellow standard of the sultanate.¹⁸ He was sheltered under a parasol which, from 1514, was no longer surmounted by a bird but by a crescent.¹⁹ There were no solemn entries into other towns, where the sultan was officially received on a platform outside the town.²⁰ The official game of polo continued to offer the populace a rite, which had become a spectacle of mounted amīrs.

However, the locations for displays of power had changed. Within the Citadel the fourteenth century *Qaṣr* was abandoned in favour of the Courtyard (*Hawsh*), the great square (*maydān*) at the foot of the Citadel, laid out as a garden by al-Ghawrī, or the mausoleum of Yashbak at al-Maṭariyya where open spaces prevailed.²¹ At the foot of the Citadel, the royal stables frequently provided a setting for the *mazālim* appellate court: the exercise of authority was to be more visible. More and more frequently the sultans would set out without pomp to cross Cairo and visit this grand amīr or that civil administrator, and some showed a flair for contact with the crowd.²² From 1422, Barsbāy abolished the practice of prostration before the sultan, replacing it with a bow.²³ The sultan's family became more prominent: first the eldest son, who alone with the *atābak* was authorized (in Egypt only) to brandish the royal parasol,²⁴ but also the sultanas, some of whom were deemed too influential; from Qāyrbāy's time, the royal parasol was borne over their heads as well, but only within the Citadel.²⁵ The residences in the Citadel also accommodated descendants of Qalāwūn and princess consorts, concubines, mothers, sisters, and daughters of former sultans; and if deposed Circassian sultans and their male children were generally relegated to Alexandria, there were occasions when certain of them, even at times former sultans, returned to the Citadel for family visits.

¹⁷ for i., Ibn Taghri Birdī, *Nujūm*, VI, 540; Khalil al-Zāhiri, *Zubda*, 86–87.

¹⁸ Ibn Taghri Birdī, *Nujūm*, VI, 693–94.

¹⁹ Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i*, IV, 412.

²⁰ for i., Ibn Taghri Birdī, *Nujūm*, VI, 376.

²¹ J.-C. Garcin, B. Maury, J. Revault and M. Zakaryn, *Palais et maisons du Caire du XIV^e au XVIII^e siècle*, I (Paris, 1982), 191, 193–7.

²² Ibn Taghri Birdī, *Nujūm*, VI, 627.

²³ Al-Maqrizi, *Sulūk*, VI, 608; Ibn Taghri Birdī, *Nujūm*, VI, 559.

²⁴ Ibn Taghri Birdī, *Nujūm*, VI, 694.

²⁵ Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i*, III, 106.

Assassinations of sultans occurred only at times of great political crisis (Faraj at the beginning of the century, al-Nāṣir Muḥamad or Jānbalāt at the end). The sultanate had profoundly changed.

We have seen how a Circassian aristocracy began to emerge as a reaction to the resumption of diversified recruitment during Shaykh's reign. The primacy bestowed on Barqūq's former mamlūks, and subsequently on those enfranchized by them, constituted a kind of nobility based on seniority, ever more closely linked to the Mamlūk traditions as the difficulty of integrating recruits from Barsbāy's time seemed to threaten them. This tendency was accentuated under Qāyṭbāy for the same reasons. It is difficult to assess the overall numbers of mamlūks; wars and plague came along to counteract the effect of purchases. We have seen that Barqūq bought 5,000 royal mamlūks; they numbered more than 3,000 on the eve of the advent of Barsbāy;²⁶ Barsbāy himself is thought to have bought more than 2,000²⁷ and Qāyṭbāy 8,000 mamlūks.²⁸ The number of royal mamlūks would have been 7,000 just before Marj Dābiq (whereas only about a thousand mamlūks of the amīrs went to fight).²⁹

What do these figures imply about the aristocracy of the amīrs? The number of important amīrs seems to have declined appreciably after Barqūq. In 1486, only 15 amīrs of a hundred, 10 amīrs of forty, 60 amīrs of ten and 40 *khaṣṣakīs* remained.³⁰ It is not until 1502 that we find the traditional count of 24 amīrs of a hundred again, with 75 amīrs of forty, 180 amīrs of ten and 800 *khaṣṣakīs*, soon to be increased to 1,200;³¹ and at the end of Ghawri's reign there were 27 amīrs of a hundred, with 300 amīrs of forty and of ten.³² Around the sultan, the hierarchy of the amīrs was fixed as follows, in descending order of rank: the *atābak*, the *amīr silāh*, the *amīr majlis*, the *amīr akhūr*, the *dawādār*, the *ra's nawbat al-nuwāb*, the *hājib al-ḥujjāb*.³³ In official ceremonies, in particular the royal services, the place of each one in relation to the sultan was strictly laid down: on the right (where the highest rank was occupied by the *atābak*) or on the left (where the sultan's son occupied the highest rank),³⁴ but it was always meticulously calculated according to the merits of those present and was the subject of subtle contrivances so as to respect the rights of each one; this aristocracy clung passionately to its rights.

Promotions of the grand amīrs generally followed ascending order of rank

²⁶ Ibn Taghri Birdi, *Nujūm*, VI, 534.

²⁷ Ibn Taghri Birdi, *Nujūm*, VI, 773.

²⁸ Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i*, III, 325.

²⁹ Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i*, V, 44-45.

³⁰ Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i*, III, 222-23.

³¹ Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i*, IV, 30-34.

³² Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i*, V, 3-4.

³³ for i., Ibn Taghri Birdi, *Nujūm*, VII, 37.

³⁴ for i., Ibn Taghri Birdi, *Nujūm*, VI, 364.

and one may wonder to what extent in the fifteenth century, as in the European courts of the period, even the most characteristic ones still corresponded to precise functions. It is clear that under Qāyrbāy the dawādār Yashbak had frequently led his troops into battle, whereas the *atābak* Azbak was engaged in the maintenance of internal order.³⁵ Moreover, the dawādārs at the end of the Circassian regime exercised a power that cannot be explained by the hierarchy of rank, but more probably by their role regarding the state finances at that period. Finally there no longer seems to have been any connection between the rank and the political role of a particular amīr who became spokesman for an age group.

Women seem to have played a large part in establishing links between families, whose assets they often managed.³⁶ Beyond the political confrontations, matrimonial alliances ensured the cohesion of this elite, in which the descendants of the fourteenth-century Turkish mamlūks, no longer seen as a threat, were respected for the antiquity of their origins; there is even mention of a descendant of Baybars in the highest society at the end of the fifteenth century.³⁷ Under Qāyrbāy, the richest families readily provided the spectacle of the sumptuous festivals (weddings, circumcisions), still further provoking the anger, even physical aggression, of the recruits. Wealth was necessary: since the days of Barqūq, nomination to the higher ranks involved payments to the sultan; the revenues that accompanied those ranks would soon allow the new holder to restore his finances.

Below the grand families, all gradations were possible within that mass of descendants of mamlūks who called themselves "the people" (*al-nās*). They always counted to some extent on receiving some sort of pension and royal bounty in order to live when they had no handy family relationship to enable them to obtain positions that only true mamlūks were supposed to occupy.

The Mamlūk state was always run by civilian administrators who made up the various *diwāns* in the capital.³⁸ To the traditional *diwāns* (*diwān al-wizāra*, *diwān al-inshā'*, *diwān al-jaysh*, *diwān al-khāṣṣ*), a very important new one was added as we have seen, the *diwān al-mufrad*, entrusted to a civilian who nevertheless bore the military title of *ustādār*. It can be estimated that, at the end of the fourteenth century, the staff of these *diwāns* numbered around a thousand individuals in the capital.³⁹ It is clear that the

³⁵ Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i*, III, 92.

³⁶ Carl Petry, "Class Solidarity vs. Gender Gain: Women as Custodians of Property in Later Medieval Egypt," in Nikki Keddie and Beth Baron (eds.), *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender* (New Haven, 1991), 122–41.

³⁷ Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i*, III, 257.

³⁸ C. Petry, *The Civilian Elite of Cairo in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1981), 202–20; Martel-Thoumian, *Les civils et l'administration*, 35–38.

³⁹ We can deduce this from Ibn Taghri Birdi, *Nujūm*, V, 490.

attention paid to the management of resources occupies a growing place in the historical sources and this must correspond to its growing importance. In its early days, the importance of the *diwān al-mufrad*, where the sultan could find new resources, explains the political role that unscrupulous individuals like Sa'd al-Dīn ibn Ghurāb (d. 1406) or Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf al-Birī, known as Jamāl al-Dīn al-Ustādār (d. 1409) were able to play in the reign of Faraj.⁴⁰ With the stabilization of the political situation, we see great families of varying origins, whose history has been studied, regularly occupying the top posts in the different *diwāns*: the Banū al-Haysam (converted Copts from Cairo), the Banū Naṣr Allāh (Muslims from Lower Egypt), the Banu'l-Kuwayz (converted Melkite Christians from Jordan), the Banu'l-Bārīzī (Muslims from Ḥamā), the Banū Muḥzir (Muslims from Damascus), the Banū Kātib Jakam (converted Copts from Cairo) and lastly the Banu'l-Jī'ān (converted Copts from Damietta).⁴¹

Often allied with the sultans while they were still only amīrs, some of them subsequently acquired real political influence; men such as the confidential secretary (*kātib al-sirr*) from 1413 to 1420, Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Barīzī; the supervisor of the army bureau (*nāzir al-jaysh*) from 1421 to 1439, Zayn al-Dīn 'Abd al-Bāsīt; the supervisor of the privy fund (*nāzir al-khāṣṣ*) from 1437 to 1458, Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf ibn Kātib Jakam; and the confidential secretary from 1438 to 1452, Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn al-Bārīzī. As their importance increased, the Christian origin of some of them aroused reactions of which the sultans were aware but which never had lasting consequences. The sultans became accustomed to finding the administrators necessary for the smooth functioning of the system in this milieu that was generally cultivated, wealthy and pious. Sometimes they were allied by marriage to the top ranks of the Circassian aristocracy, even to the families of the sultans. The costume of the civilian official no longer indicated a lower rank and was sometimes preferred to the uniform of the amīr.⁴²

From Qāyrbāy's reign, however, we note yet another new development. The determination to find the necessary resources by whatever means then led the sultans to turn to men from civilian society and trade (money-changers, retailers, purveyors of meat, furriers) whose know-how and lack of scruples were doubtless appreciated. The traditional sources obviously saw only the dishonesty, low origins and insolence of these uncultured men, who now donned the respectable garb of secretaries of the *diwāns* and were in their eyes the sultans' condemned souls. They occupied various posts in the royal offices and the market inspectorate (*hisba*), like the notorious Zayn

⁴⁰ Martel-Thoumian, *Les civils et l'administration*, 99–105.

⁴¹ Martel-Thoumian, *Les civils et l'administration*, 181–325.

⁴² Ibn Taghri Birdi, *Nujūm*, VI, 727.

al-Dīn Bakarāt ibn Mūsā, whose career would continue under the Ottomans.⁴³

It may be thought that this civilian elite, even in its last representatives (still an elite?), did not emerge from the social fabric autonomously but that it too was a creation of the mamlūk system. The sultans tolerated the fact that these families grew rich, though their resources could quite clearly not be derived from the tasks entrusted solely to them. It was thus the rule to buy office, just as for the amīrs. When their services were deemed unsatisfactory or when too much money had been accumulated, the sultans had no hesitation in resorting to the most brutal treatment, which they applied to all who served them (prison, beatings). They confiscated property and exacted (often under torture) huge sums which one may suspect were being deducted from moneys already levied in the name of the sultan.

The Circassian Mamlūks and Egypt

The political development of the mamlūk system that we have described was important in a society where the army, as the holder of both political and economic power, could be a driving force or a brake on society as a whole. It is this aspect that is often the most visible in the chronicles. It is still the case that this development has its place in a more general context which transcended it and, in a sense, induced it, a context dominated by the great events that affected Egypt. And first of all the succession of epidemics: those under the Circassians in 1388-89, 1397-98, 1403-07, 1410-11, 1415-19, 1429-30, 1438-39, 1444-49, 1455, 1459-60, 1468-69, 1476-77, 1492, 1498, 1504-05 and 1513-14.⁴⁴ These resulted in a decline in wealth production, and an imbalance between the Bedouin, who were less affected, and the settled population. These phenomena also affected other countries to the south of the Mediterranean (in particular the Maghrib) and were not peculiar to Egypt or to the Mamlūk regime. Nor should we overlook the monetary phenomena linked with the production and circulation of certain metals (gold, silver, copper), which concern a zone that is much bigger still. But because our sources of information in Egypt emanate from urban milieus, themselves closely linked to the military society that dominated them and kept them alive, we can only perceive these phenomena through the contacts maintained by the Mamlūk regime with the civilian population.

The concentration of the majority of the amīrs, the holders of power and

⁴³ Petry, *Twilight of Majesty*, 55, 105, 145, 148-52; C. Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians? The Last Mamlūk Sultans and Egypt's Waning as a Great Power* (Albany, 1994), 131-89.

⁴⁴ B. Shoshan, "Notes sur les épidémies de peste en Égypte," *Annales de démographie historique* (1981), 395-403.

wealth, in the capital, and the large size of the population living there (at least 270,000 inhabitants, a considerable figure for the period),⁴⁵ as well as the presence there of a significant proportion of the civilian elites, lend political significance to the relations of the Mamlūk state with the people of Cairo. Moreover, this population was in constant touch with the nearby province, whence rural dwellers arrived quite regularly, fleeing insecurity and despotism. The voids created by the epidemics were easily filled in a capital which by that very fact was being ruralized in some aspects at that period, hence the creation of those great courtyard tenements, the *hawsh*, where the poor families were herded together.⁴⁶

The political vicissitudes were dangerous for the urban population in that the challenge to a sultan by a party of amīrs left the civilians defenseless, and the triumph of one or other party meant searches in the district where the defeated party's tenants lived and the plundering of residences and possibly neighbouring dwellings. When armed confrontations were limited to the area round the Citadel, it often happened that the town centre was not affected and indeed everyday activities went on as though nothing was happening. But at times of major crisis, Cairo could become a battlefield, as in 1497 when the battle line stretched from Fustāt in the south to Maṭariyya in the north.⁴⁷ The conflicting parties did not hesitate to swell their ranks by offering to pay anyone who wanted to fight. But it might also be that members of the populace would take part in the fighting without payment, perhaps hoping for plunder but giving vent as well to sympathies that had revealed themselves in less dramatic circumstances. Sultans such as Barqūq,⁴⁸ Jaqmaq,⁴⁹ al-Zāhir Qānṣūh,⁵⁰ Al-ʿĀdil Tūmānbāy,⁵¹ even al-Ghawrī⁵² had had their moments of popularity which they tried to exploit in their outings into the town, but these might also earn them unpleasant comments at times of price rises, monetary fluctuations or the imposition of a new market tax. Whether or not this popular opinion was well founded or reliable, the sultans seem to have been concerned about it. The declining numbers and power of the amīrs left them more exposed to the populace.

One element, however, came between the populace and the sultan: the

⁴⁵ J.-C. Garcin, "The Mamlūk Military System and the Blocking of Medieval Muslim Society," in J. Baechler et al. (eds.), *Europe and the Rise of Capitalism* (Oxford, 1998), 119–23/"Le système militaire mamlūk et le blocage de la société musulmane médiévale," *AI*, 25 (1988), 93–110.

⁴⁶ Garcin et al., *Palais et maisons*, 202–03.

⁴⁷ Ibn Iyas, *Badāʾiʿ*, III, 366–67.

⁴⁸ Ibn Taghri Birdi, *Nujūm*, V, 544–45.

⁴⁹ Ibn Taghri Birdi, *Nujūm*, VII, 116.

⁵⁰ Ibn Iyas, *Badāʾiʿ*, III, 405.

⁵¹ Ibn Iyas, *Badāʾiʿ*, III, 451.

⁵² Ibn Iyas, *Badāʾiʿ*, IV, 94, 327.

recruits. Living in barracks in the Citadel, they were feared by the people of Cairo. When their pay was delayed, they attacked places where the civilian and military authorities lived, even the sultan's grain stores or the districts (Būlāq, for example) where the amīr aristocracy had invested their fortune in residences, apartments to rent (*rabʿ*) or commercial buildings. But they also took advantage of festivals, when the populace came out in droves, to carry out raids on civilians. Speaking hardly any Arabic, they knew they were despised and they complained to the sultan about the slights isolated individuals received. In 1450 they demanded that their privileges as mamlūks be respected, in particular that of being the only ones allowed to use horses.⁵³ When the wars with the Ottomans took the army away, the population felt relieved. The sultans were increasingly judged on their ability to keep the recruits in order.

When the recruits finally became an integral part of the mamlūk body as a whole, they were housed in the town in luxurious or modest apartments, according to rank, mostly rented;⁵⁴ the main thing was that there should be a stable. The rents often served to sustain the private trusts (*awqāf*) of the ancient families of civilian or military notables. Amīrs, too, could settle in rented accommodation. The greatest among them followed one another in vast newly built residences, for example that of amīr Māmāy, a close friend of Qāytbāy, in the middle of the old town, or of the *atābak* Azbak in the district he had founded which bore his name, Azbakiyya. Or they occupied refurbishments of amīral residences of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, like the former palace (*dār*) of Qūṣūn at the foot of the Citadel, updated in the taste of the day by amīr Yashbak, where after him the *dawādār* traditionally resided, just as the *atābaks* lived in Azbakiyya.⁵⁵ At times of political disturbance these residences became rallying points for the different parties and consequently might suffer attacks from their opponents. Great civilian state officials also had their residences, like ʿAbd al-Bāsiṭ who had bought back and refurbished the palace of Tankiz, the all-powerful governor of Syria in the fourteenth century.⁵⁶ Sultans were not averse to paying them prolonged visits, especially when the residences were close to the Nile and the royal "services" could be held there, while the amīrs took up temporary residence nearby.

These buildings had been enlarged from the fifteenth century on and organized round a large courtyard (as in the Citadel), on to which the loggia known as *maqʿad* opened, prestige areas where senior amīrs received visitors.⁵⁷ Around the courtyard lay the large living rooms on the ground

⁵³ Ibn Taghri Birdi, *Nujūm*, VII, 205.

⁵⁴ Garcin et al., *Palais et maisons*, 197–201, 203–11.

⁵⁵ Garcin et al., *Palais et maisons*, 182–85.

⁵⁶ Martel-Thoumain, *Les civils et l'administration*, 401.

⁵⁷ Garcin et al., *Palais et maisons*, 211–13.

floor or in upper storeys (*qā'a*, *riqāq*), mamlûks' apartments, storerooms for precious objects or provisions, even a private prison. Any amîr or civilian notable might find himself given the job of making some other servant of the sultan return ill-gotten goods, often under torture, and the high ranking amîrs had ushers at their door recording requests from possible plaintiffs, whose lawsuits they dealt with more expeditiously than the *qādîs*. From these residences the amîrs extended their authority and protection to the neighborhood, to all the inhabitants of the district, who at times were required to give help with building work, to the shopkeepers whose stalls might bear the coat of arms of the amîr protector, to the people of the craft groups (*harāfish*), just coalescing,⁵⁸ even to the self-defence groups (*zu'ar*) who came more to the fore as the districts gradually shut themselves in with gates when insecurity increased towards the end of the fifteenth century, due largely to the recruits. The existence of these client links could have led to the setting-up of a feudal system if the rotation of functions had not involved the families occupying the grand residences as well. The common people made use of the protection, marveled at the festivals and felt the vagaries of political life in terms of the generosity or harshness of the protector of the moment.

The religious foundations (mosques, *madrasas*), often close to the residence, also provided all who had been trained in the *madrasas* with paid work of all grades and acceptable odd jobs. The Mamlûk aristocracy did not lack ties (by marriage) to the great families of the *qādîs*. Though sources of friction remained, such as the run-of-the-mill justice handed down by the amîrs (the sultan occasionally banned it in time of plague because he knew it was against religious law and gave rise to abuse), or the favor increasingly granted to the Ḥanafî rite, considered to be that of the Turko-Circassian power,⁵⁹ yet their interests could often converge, for example when, under Qāyṭbāy, the royal tax system turned its attention to the income of the *awqāf*, often greater than the needs of the institutions they supported,⁶⁰ the surplus going to the families of the founders and administrators. The royal monopolies, the monetary fluctuations, the market taxes were vigorously condemned by the 'ulamā'. It was to win over this social group, or else to reduce it to silence, that the sultans made play of their concern for justice. But if royal policies or the conduct of a particular amîr were judged

⁵⁸ W. M. Brinner, "The Significance of the Harāfish and their 'sultan'," *JESHO*, 6 (1963), 190-215.

⁵⁹ L. Fernandes, "Mamlûk Politics and Education: The Evidence from two Fourteenth-Century Waqfiyyas," *AI*, 23 (1987), 87-98.

⁶⁰ Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians?*, 196-219; J.-C. Garcin and M. Taher. "Enquête sur le financement d'un waqf égyptien du XV^e siècle: les comptes de Jawhâr al-Lâlâ," *JESHO*, 38 (1995), 262-304.

appropriately,⁶¹ the sultanate itself was not challenged nor was the organization of society. The teaching in the *madrasas* allowed some social mobility in the town, even the integration into urban society of men originating in the country.⁶² This can be seen in the rapid expansion of Al-Azhar towards the end of the fifteenth century when the formerly great *madrasas* were affected by the crisis. Amongst those who trained there were many who were foreign to the Mamlūk world, coming from the Maghrib or Anatolia.⁶³ Mamlūk power had nothing to fear from the *madrasa* environment.

In addition to the client links, piety formed a very strong bond between members of the military class and the civilian population. The pious foundations of the sultans and amīrs ensured public recitations of the Qurʾān and regular mystic exercises (*dhikr*). Alongside the official celebration of Islam, the quest for the intercession of the saints was widespread. In those times of terrifying epidemics which struck military circles even harder than the civilian populations, recourse to the saints was as common among the mamlūks as in the common people. The blessing of the saints (*baraka*) was sought in all circles. It is very significant that Qāyrbāy should have been duped by a false saint when his courage failed in the face of the Ottomans in 1488.⁶⁴ A man of the people was very sensitive to material difficulties, iniquitous taxes, oppression by the powerful (*zālim*) whose generosity was not even legally acceptable. The *zāwiyyas* of the spiritual masters had often been outside the town (the search for the Way was traditionally linked with travel), but the country folk had brought them into urban territory.⁶⁵ Each spiritual master was a member of the invisible society of the saints, itself forming a strict hierarchy under the direction of the "Pole" of the time, who in fact mysteriously directed the world. Common acknowledgment of this society of the Invisible minimized tribulations and the ups and downs of politics and made any idea of rebellion pointless. It was in the *zāwiyya* of one saint, Abu'l-Su'ūd al-Jārihi, that the dawādār Tūmānbāy accepted the sultanate in 1516 on the eve of the Ottoman invasion, after renouncing unjust taxes, which won him popular support.⁶⁶

It was more usual to solicit the political assent of the civilian population

⁶¹ B. Shoshan, "Grain Riots and the 'Moral Economy': Cairo, 1350-1517," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 10, 3 (1979-80), 459-78.

⁶² J.-C. Garcin, "L'insertion sociale de Sha'rānī dans le milieu cairote," *Colloque international sur l'histoire du Caire* (Cairo, 1969), 159-68.

⁶³ Petry, *The Civilian Elite*; idem., "Travel Patterns of Medieval Notables in the Near East," *SI*, 62 (1985), 53-88.

⁶⁴ J.-C. Garcin, "Deux saints populaires du Caire au debut du XVI^e siècle," *BEO*, 29 (1977), 140.

⁶⁵ J.-C. Garcin, "Assises matérielles et rôle économique des ordres soufis dans l'histoire des peuples musulmans," in A. Popovic and G. Veinstein (eds.), *Les voies d'Allah* (Paris, 1995), 223.

⁶⁶ Garcin, "Deux saints populaires," 135.

in the great official ceremonies using the urban setting, chiefly along the main thoroughfare or *Qaṣabah* lined with the most beautiful monuments from the Bāb al-Naṣr to the Citadel, where the districts were decorated by order. Royal entry processions and the return of victorious armies were the occasions for the finest ceremonies inspiring genuine or feigned enthusiasm, depending on the economic context. These festivals did much to establish the legitimacy of the sultans. The return of the troops after the occupation of Cyprus in 1426 (when many civilian volunteers had accompanied the mamlūks) occasioned one of the greatest demonstrations of the unity of the Muslim population of Cairo, in which delegations from the towns and from the Bedouin of the Delta took part.⁶⁷

Each year, the procession of the symbolic palanquin (*mahmal*) marking the preeminence of the Mamlūk sultan at the ceremonies of the pilgrimage,⁶⁸ the presentation of the covering of the Ka'ba (*kiswa*), woven in Egypt (another Egyptian privilege), which was transformed towards the end of the Circassian period into the presentation of seven hangings to cover the tombs of the prophets in Mamlūk territory (especially the tomb of Abraham in Hebron) marked the sultanate's prominent position in the Muslim world.⁶⁹ From Barsbāy's time, the ceremonies of the birth of the prophet or *mawlid al-nabī* (the reading of the Traditions of Bukhārī in the *Ḥawsh* at the Citadel) provided further confirmation of the Muslim character of the sultanate. Barqūq's visits to the tombs of al-Shāfi'ī or al-Sayyida Nafisa,⁷⁰ Qāyrbāy's to the sanctuaries of Aḥmad al-Badawī or Ibrahīm al-Dassūqī⁷¹ proclaimed yet again the Egyptian piety of the sultans. If the sultans were well able to make these Islamic celebrations serve their legitimization, they were also adept at exploiting the Nile festivals, involving the entire population at the breaking of the dike, over which the sultan presided. The building by al-Ghawrī alongside the Nilometer (*Miqyās*) of a royal palace where a veil fluttering at a widow announced that the flood had reached its maximum was more than a mere extravagant fantasy on the part of the sultan.⁷² Conversely, poor floods brought together all the religious communities in the desert around the plainly dressed sultan to implore God's clemency. In 1419, a ceremony of that nature, followed by al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh, who was not in the best of health, swimming across the Nile, resulted in the Nile starting to rise again, after previously ceasing to do so.⁷³

⁶⁷ Ibn Taghri Birdī, *Nujūm*, VI, 612–13.

⁶⁸ J. Jomier, *Le Mahmal et la caravane égyptienne des pèlerins de La Mecque* (Cairo, 1953).

⁶⁹ Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i*, IV, 337.

⁷⁰ Ibn Taghri Birdī, *Nujūm*, V, 560–61.

⁷¹ Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i*, III, 156–199.

⁷² Ibn Iyas, *Badā'i*, IV, 389.

⁷³ Ibn Taghri Birdī, *Nujūm*, VI, 414.

If we can accept that, in spite of the epidemics, the figure for the population of the capital remained relatively stable over a long period, it is likely, on the other hand, that the population of some 2,500 localities in Egypt decreased considerably. The yield of agrarian land, and so of the *iqṭāʿ*s, had fallen, which explains the growing imbalance between the sultan's resources and those of the amīrs. In Barsbāy's time, large stretches seem still to have been abandoned after the plague of the start of the century and those that followed. The structures for maintaining order had been weakened; it was to escape Bedouin disturbances that the country people flocked into the towns.

The Mamlūk state imposed its authority outside Cairo through boards of amīrs, nominated in the provinces, the eight provinces of Lower Egypt (excluding Alexandria) and the seven provinces of Upper Egypt.⁷⁴ Depending on the size of the provinces, amīrs of forty or of ten were nominated. We have seen that, on the eve of Barqūq's accession to the sultanate, an attempt was made to regroup the Egyptian provinces into three *niyābas* (constituencies under the control of a *nāʾib al-saltāna* or delegate of the sultan), each under an amīr of one hundred as in Syria; they were centered on Alexandria, Damanhūr and Asyūṭ. But already for Lower and Upper Egypt the nomination of two amīrs of inspection (*kāshif*) was announced; this was an old-established, temporary mission whereby amīrs were sent into the province to inspect the state of the dikes and canals and see to it that the crops, always under threat from the Bedouin, were safeguarded. After the crisis at the beginning of the century, it is noteworthy that this reform was abandoned. While Alexandria kept its *nāʾib*, it was three *kushshāf* who were sent into Lower Egypt and three into Upper Egypt, over the governors.⁷⁵ The need to control the Bedouin was becoming more pressing.

In Upper Egypt, the legacy of the fourteenth century weighed heavily. Traditionally the Egyptian state relied on the tribes from the South (known as "*Qaysi*" – basically the Banū Hilāl and the Banū Kanz) who were responsible for security on the spice trail towards Aydhāb and had backed the Egyptian thrust into Nubia. In the course of the fourteenth century, the Mamlūk state had been unable to prevent the rising power of the Yemeni tribes of Middle Egypt: the Juhayna, ʿArak and Balī, to whom the opening up of the trails to central Africa (*darb al-arbaʿin*) had brought wealth and a determination to settle more permanently in the valley. The Mamlūk government had recognized this new situation and this change of alliance

⁷⁴ Khalil al-Zahiri, *Zubda*, 32–36; W. Popper, *Egypt and Syria under the Circassian Sultans, 1382–1468 AD: Systematic Notes to Ibn Taghri Birdi's Chronicles of Egypt*. University of California Publications in Semitic Philology, XV–XVI (Berkeley, 1955, 1957), 13–14.

⁷⁵ Khalil al-Zahiri, *Zubda*, 129–130.

had led to the insurrection of the southern tribes. The spice route to Aydhāb had had to be abandoned around 1360. As for the Arab tribes of Middle Egypt, the settling of the Berber Hawwāra at Girga to contain them was a risky gamble. All it achieved was the enhanced power of the family of the Banū 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz at Girga, grown rich from the same sources of wealth, and the fifteenth century sultans ultimately had to accept it, as we have seen. In the south, Aswān, under the control of the Banū Kanz, had left the Mamlūk territory proper. After that, the sultans were seeking above all to prevent too many Bedouin from the Delta moving into Upper Egypt, by exerting firm control in the Fayyūm, through which the tribes passed.⁷⁶ From the fifteenth century, Upper Egypt, with the spice trade no longer passing through, was less tightly controlled because it was less important. The pigeon post no longer functioned to the south. Fewer families from the south came to Cairo.⁷⁷

It may be assumed that this gradual settling of the Bedouin in strength in the valley (helped by the epidemics that had hit the villages and towns) reached Lower Egypt in turn in the Circassian period. The Bedouin populations were prepared to be managed by dominant families on whom the Mamlūk government conferred the duties of *mashyakha* of the province and to whom they awarded *iqṭā'āt*, in recognition of their responsibility for controlling the roads and their duty to provide camels and horses for the army. The Bedouin from the centre of the Delta were no real problem. Their dominant families, the Banū Abī-Shawārib from Qalyūbiyya or the Banū Baghdād from Gharbiyya were noteworthy, often cultivated, occasionally builders of *madrassa* like the Hawwāra of Upper Egypt; one of them is mentioned as having taken his fallāḥīn on the pilgrimage in 1513. It was a different story in Buḥayra, where the *mashyakha* fell to the Banū Saqr (of the Banū Hilāl), living near Taruja, and in Sharqiyya, where the *mashyakha* fell to the Banū Baqar (of the Judhām near al-'Abbāsa). The fifteenth century cadastre shows that more than 20 percent of the *iqṭā's* cited in Buḥayra and 46 percent of the *iqṭā's* in Sharqiyya went to the Bedouin. This does not indicate a corresponding proportion of lands; at this period we have no knowledge of the areas actually being worked, or the yields. But it implies a very substantial presence of Bedouin shaykhs who often levied the total of the contributions required of them on the fallāḥīn and on the revenues of the amiral *iqṭā's*. In fact they had become official authorities in the Egyptian countryside after the model of the *kāshif*, formerly charged with controlling them. They had entered the Mamlūk system. But when the ruling power was in difficulties because of the army's departure to the borders, some of them rose up and plundered. They would rally to the Ottomans; when Ṭūmānbāy

⁷⁶ J. -C. Garcin, "al-Ṣa'id," *Elz*, VIII.

⁷⁷ J.-C. Garcin, *Un centre musulman*, 432-45.

was fleeing, he could get no support from the amīr of the Hawwāra and was handed over by the amīr of Tarūja. Already they were often just as much the true masters of the fallāhīn as the Mamlūks were. But, unlike the Upper Ṣaʿīd, the Delta would not slip out of the control of Cairo, which was too close by.⁷⁸

It is not surprising that, despite the epidemics, the towns seem to have maintained their importance, due to the role they were able to play in the struggle against the Bedouin or to the protection they gave; hence Bilbeis and Damanhūr in the Delta beside al-Maḥalla, which was less in danger and remained the major center; Madinat al-Fayyūm, Minya or Asyūt in Upper Egypt. On the other hand, in the south, Qūṣ was in decline and would not recover from the abandonment of the Aydhāb route, and Aswān was in ruins. In the north, Alexandria, much afflicted by plagues and too close to the Buḥayra tribes, was just an empty shell, menaced by European pirates. The Portuguese blockade in the Indian Ocean and fiscal pressure to collect still more resources completed its ruin, to the benefit of Rashīd, with easier access on the Nile.⁷⁹ Whereas the Christians would remain the majority in Upper Egypt,⁸⁰ where the pace of conversion to Islam was slackening in the part of the south no longer linked to the north by the spice route, by contrast Islam was spreading strongly in the Delta. The style of Muslim religious buildings in the south would long continue to reflect Fāṭimid, Ayyūbid and Turkish Mamlūk models from before the advent of the Circassians, whereas the Delta built its mosques in the taste of fifteenth-century Cairo. The appreciable difference between Upper Egypt and the Delta is one of the legacies of the Circassian era.

Conclusion

The increasing imbalance between the revenues of the amīrs and of the sultan, in the context of the internal struggles for influence typical of a military society, led in the fifteenth century to the dysfunction of the system for integrating the mamlūks and to the defeat at Marj Dābiq. The formation of a military aristocracy, which soon had no thought but the defence of its privileges, was another effect of the dysfunction and grew up to destroy the system. When the Circassian state collapsed in 1517, what disappeared was a political and military structure in crisis and too burdensome for the country's resources. The last sultans had sought to keep it going by means of

⁷⁸ J.-C. Garcin, "Note sur les rapports entre bédouins et fellahs à l'époque mamluke," *AI*, 14 (1978), 147–63.

⁷⁹ M. Müller-Wiener, *Eine Stadtgeschichte Alexandrias von 564/1169 bis in die Mitte des 9./15. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1992), 71–89, 172–233.

⁸⁰ Khalil al-Zahiri, *Zubda*, 33.

brutal fiscal extortion;⁸¹ one of their failures was undoubtedly that they were incapable of innovation in that field or of making use of exceptional tax systems that often allowed wars (as happened in the monarchies of western Europe at that period) in order to ensure that the state functioned more smoothly. But that would have militated against the privileges of the regime's notables. Yet the Ottomans would inherit an experience of administration in which the measures taken were already frequently a matter of accepted secular practice and the liberalities of the first Mamlūk state had gradually been abandoned, despite the criticisms of the "avarice" of the sultans. In their way, and under the pressure of circumstances, the Circassians had favoured the emergence of the more modern state of the Ottomans in Egypt. The Circassian aristocracy would remain in place; it was now firmly entrenched. In the course of becoming settled, the Bedouin had imposed their presence in the countryside and, when they could, the rural inhabitants left for the towns, whose population remained constant. The capital was more huddled together and had taken on the more orderly, more compartmentalized appearance of the traditional towns, around a real urban commercial centre and the al-Azhar mosque. The city had its festivals and firmly fixed devotions, in the course of which the population experienced a sense of unity. This Egypt would last a very long time.

⁸¹ Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians?*, 72-101, 131-89.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AI	<i>Annales islamologiques</i>
BEO	<i>Bulletin d'études orientales</i>
BIE	<i>Bulletin de l'Institut d'Égypte</i>
BIFAO	<i>Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire</i>
BSOAS	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
EI ²	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , 2nd edition (Leiden, 1960-).
EIR	<i>Encyclopaedia Iranica</i>
EPRO	Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire romain (Leiden)
IJMES	<i>International Journal of Middle East Studies</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JARCE	<i>Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt</i>
JESHO	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JRAS	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
MESA	Middle East Studies Association of North America (Tucson, AZ)
MIFAO	Mémoires publiés par les membres de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire
MW	<i>The Muslim World</i>
REI	<i>Revue des études islamiques</i>
SI	<i>Studia Islamica</i>
WO	<i>Die Welt des Orients</i>

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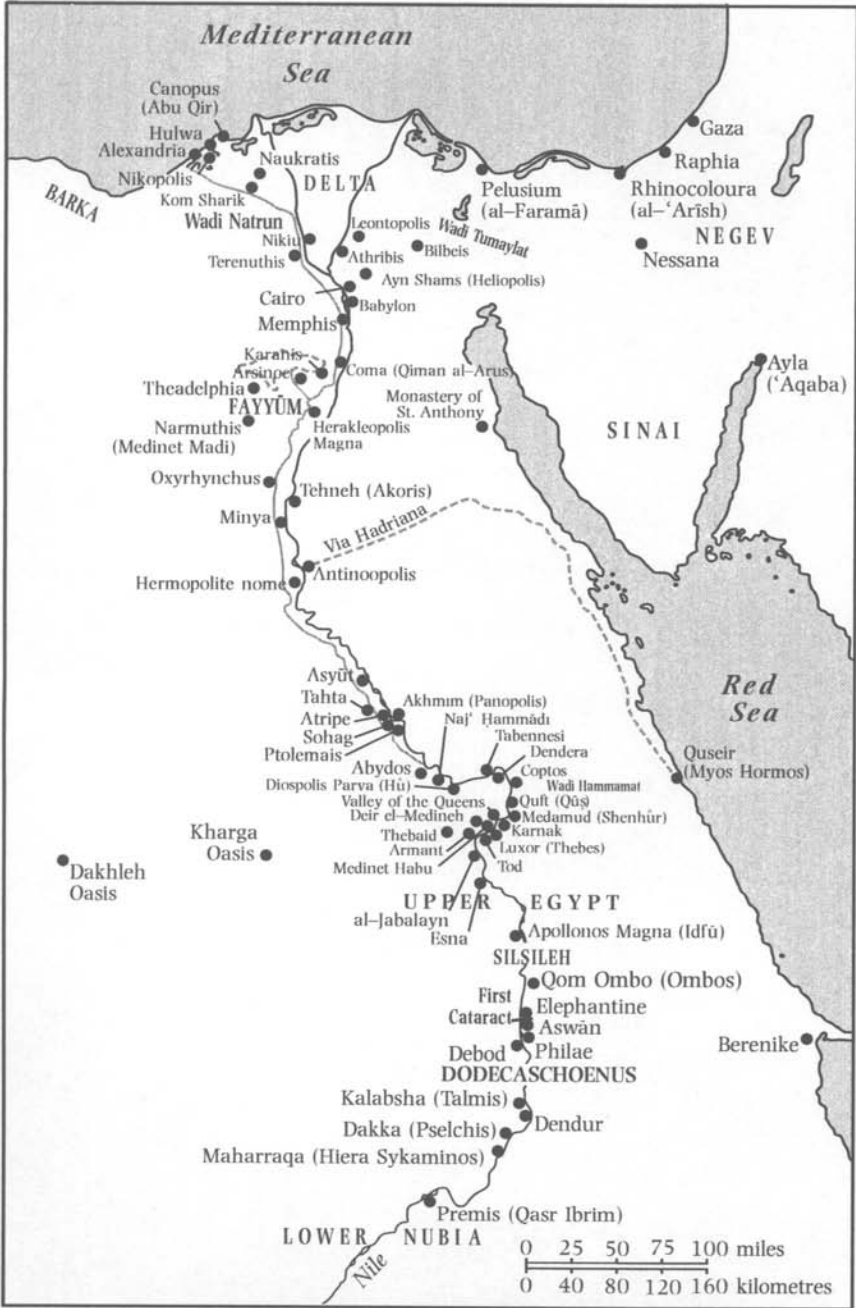
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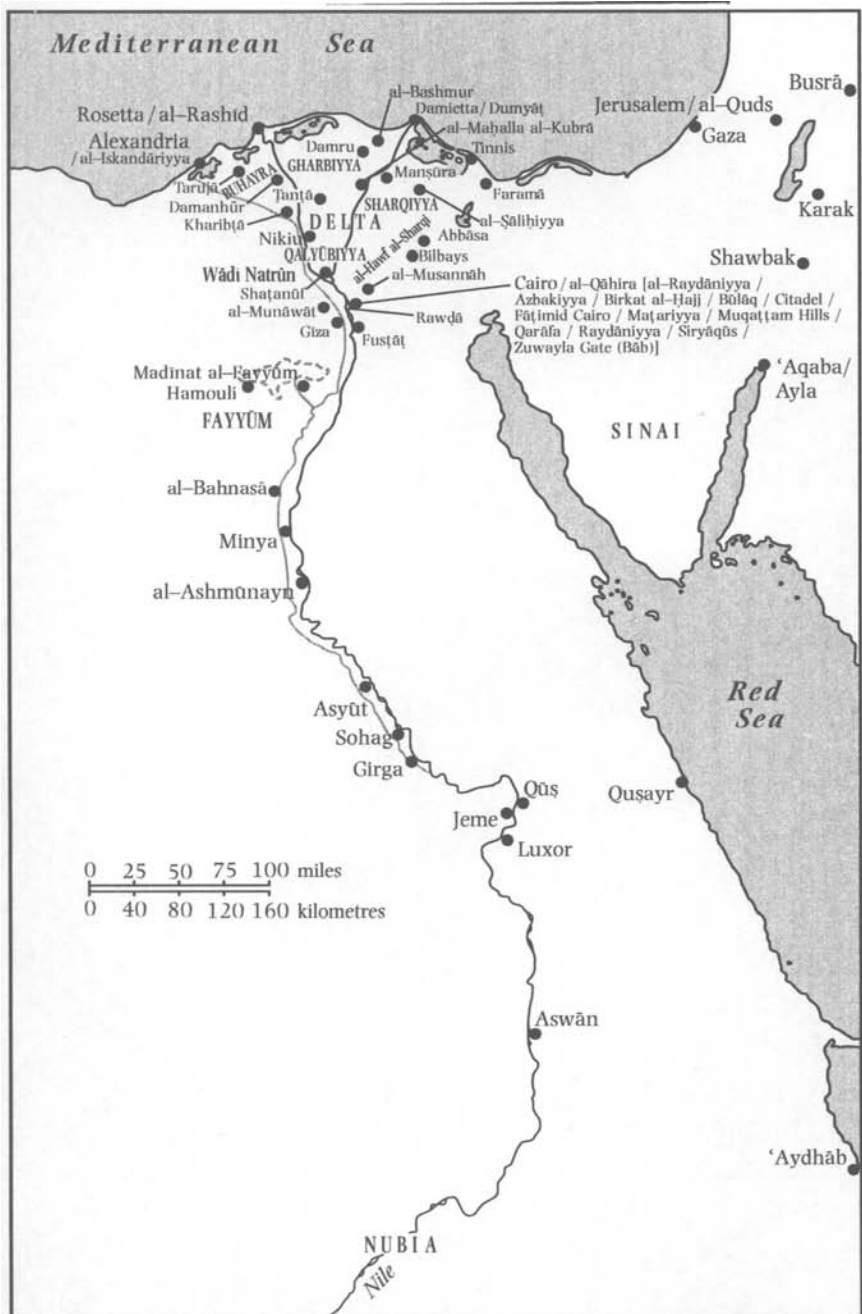
12 THE MONETARY HISTORY OF EGYPT, 642–1517

General works

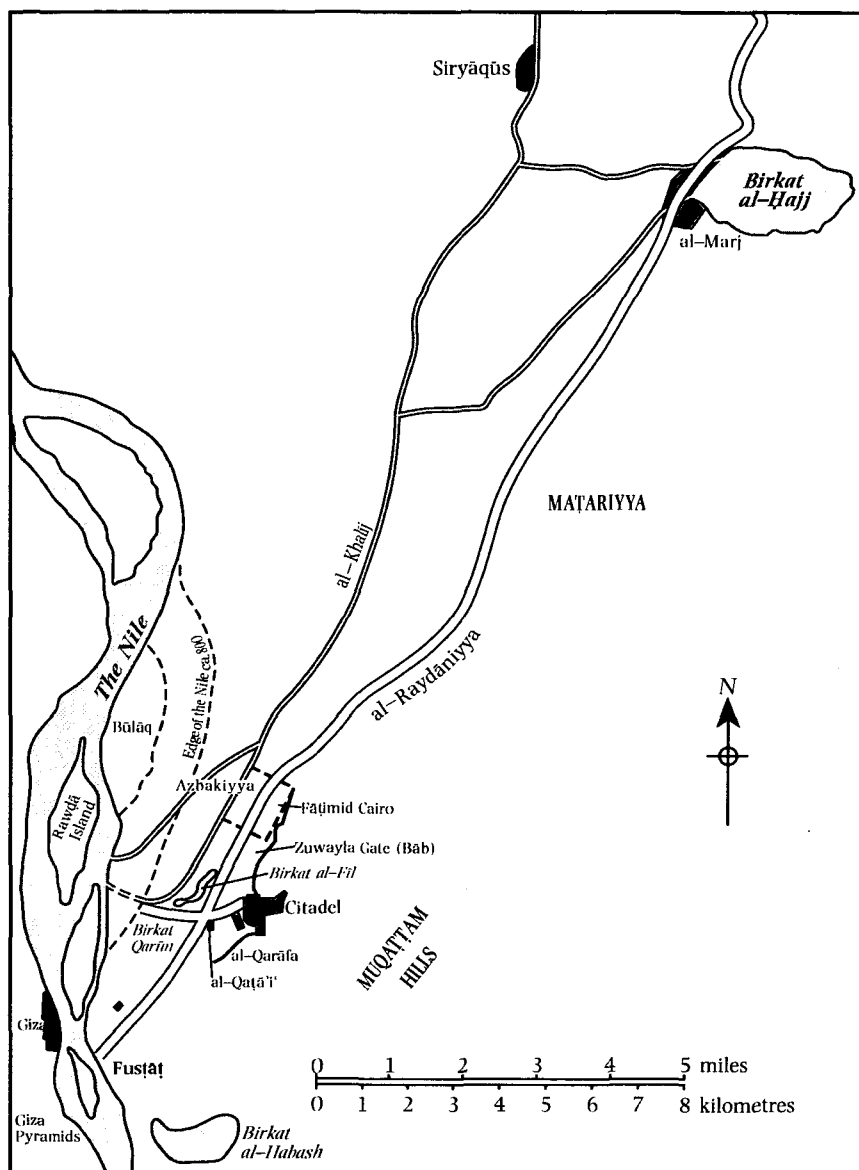
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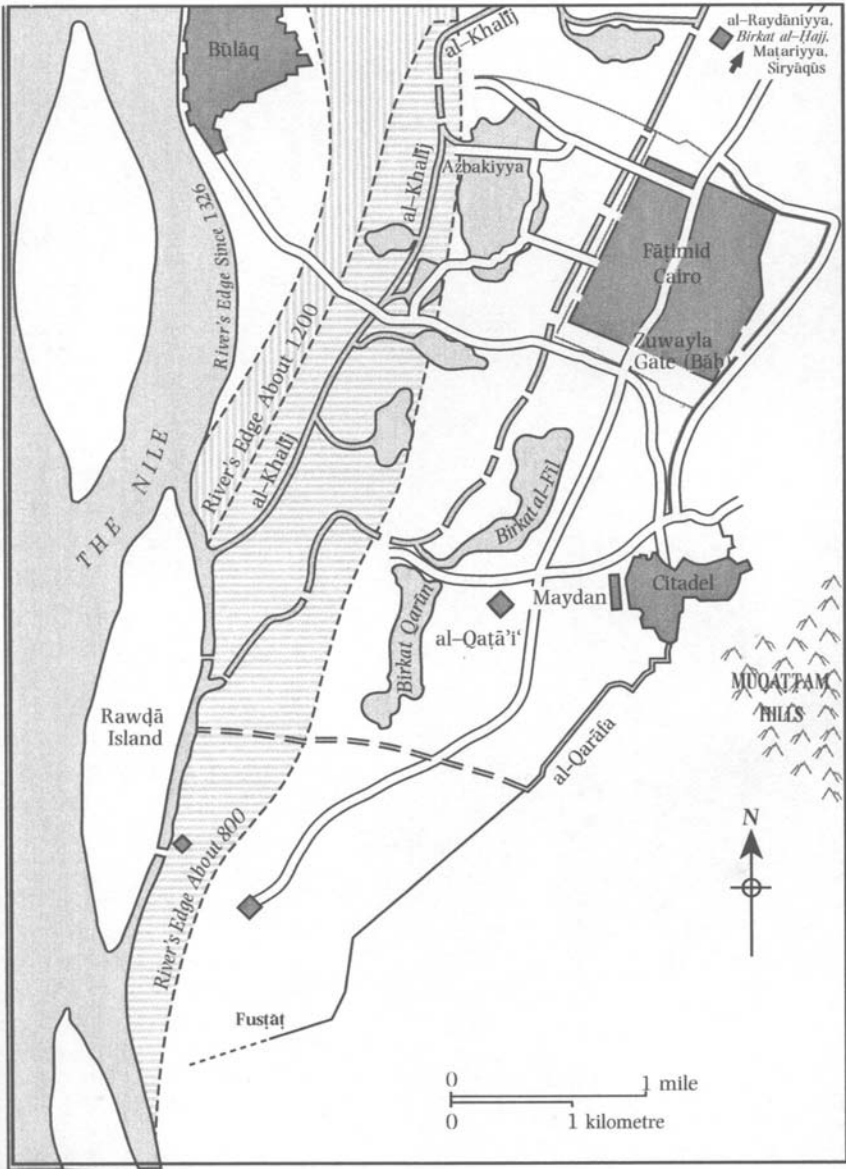
Map 1 Ptolemaic and Byzantine Egypt



Map 2 *Islamic (post-conquest) Egypt*



Map 3 Medieval Cairo environs



Map 4 Medieval Cairo